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the weekly Standard

DECEMBER 30, 1996 / JANUARY 6, 1997

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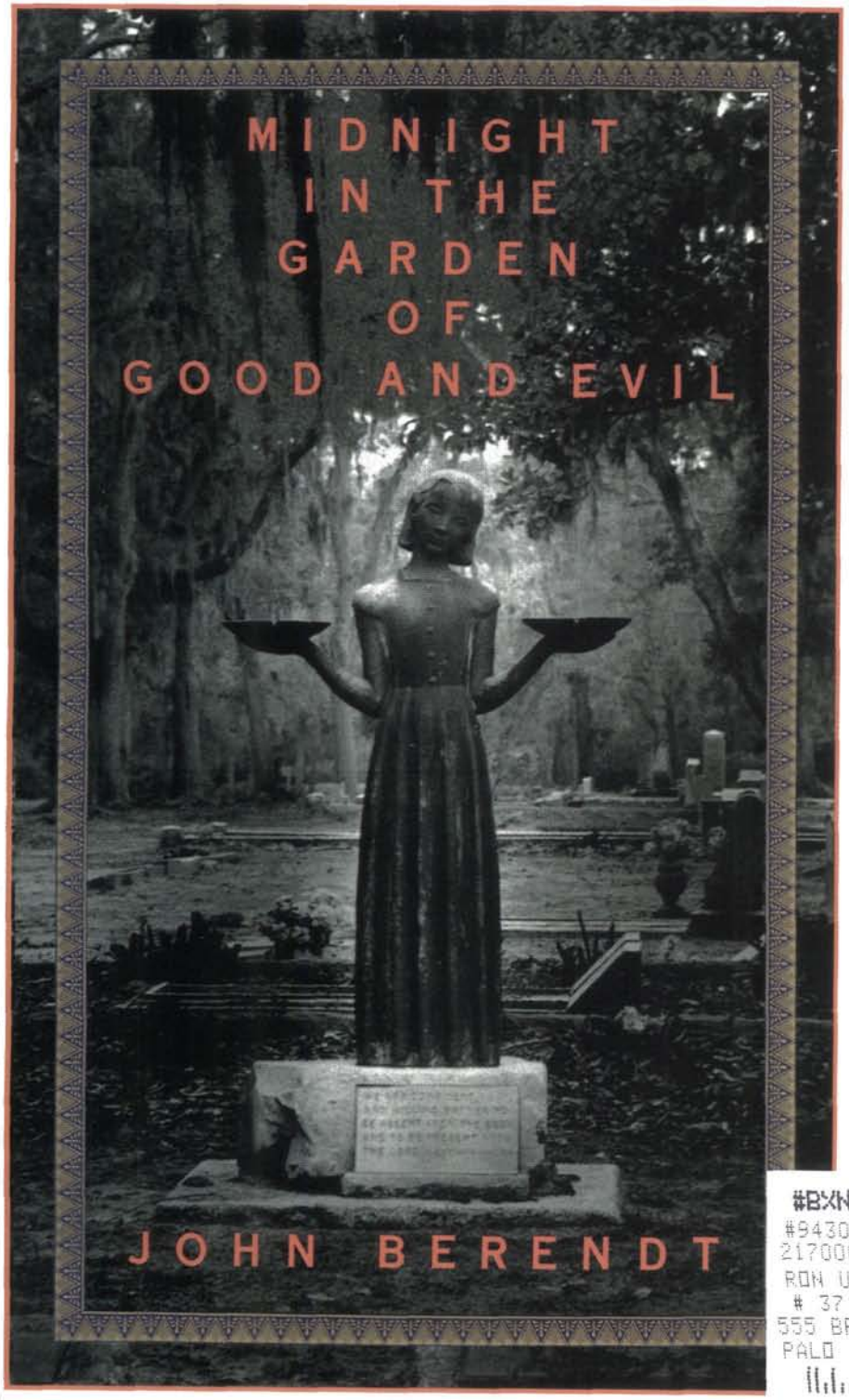

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This is a combined issue. The next WEEKLY STANDARD *will appear in two weeks. Happy New Year.*

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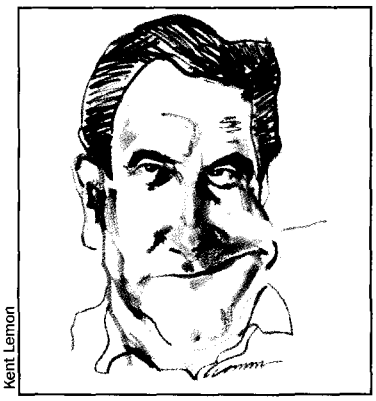

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Triangulation, Haley-style

In the race to succeed him, Haley Barbour has professed neutrality. But the outgoing chairman of the Republican National Committee is quietly using the same formidable political skills that got him the job to influence who gets it next.

RNC counsel and Barbour confidant David Norcross got off to an early start in the chairman's race with encouragement from Barbour partisans on the 165-member national committee. Norcross's campaign is being managed by Bill Harris, who ran Barbour's campaign in 1993. Next Barbour quietly "dispatched" two of his law partners, Lanny Griffith and Chris Henick, to work on behalf of New Hampshire governor Steve Merrill at the Republican Governors' Association meeting in Michigan. Not content with only two chances, Barbour opened a third front when John Grotta, another loyalist, and Bill Greener, who was Barbour's man at the San Diego convention this summer, began to run the campaign of Colorado national committeeman Jim Nicholson.

RNC committee members openly speculate Barbour's plan is to use these consultants to bring their supporters from the different camps behind his eventual "favorite" as the January 17 election nears. But by the time of the Northeast meeting in Philadelphia on December 18, more than a few committee members were muttering about this "consultant" strategy, tired of the influence of what they see as a Washington-based crowd that underperformed in the '96 elections. This may well allow "outsiders" Tom Pauken, Texas chairman, Bob Bennett, Ohio chairman, and Chuck Yob, Michigan national committeeman, to pick up more votes than anticipated.

In particular, conservatives on the committee are rallying behind Pauken to a greater degree than many expected, and some observers now put him in the first tier of candidates along with Haley's trifecta.

Mario, Mario, Wherefore . . .

Even with all the eulogic rhapsodizing over the Free Speech Movement's Mario Savio, whose heart gave out last month after the passage of Prop. 209 (or after the rearrangement of heavy furniture, depending on whose autopsy you believe), Wendy Lesser wrote such a mushy mash note in the December 15 *New York Times Book Review*, one isn't certain whether she should have published it or kicked it under his desk and giggled.

Lesser calls Savio "a poet," "a sainted Dostoyevskyan fool," "a martyr," "the last surviving member of a rare and beautiful species," even "a dead end in our evolutionary development." Which is not to diminish Savio's legacy of casting the die for the modern academy (free expression over education), which unleashed thousands of liberal-arts professors to explore then-uncharted disciplines such as gay cinema. But it is with Lesser's already overstated assessment of Savio's eloquence that we quibble: "He was the only person I have ever seen . . . who gave political speech the weight and subtlety of literature."

Excepting, of course, his own "literature," like this weighty, subtle passage from an essay entitled "Why it Happened in Berkeley": "The Berkeley students now demand what hopefully the rest of an oppressed white middle class will some day demand: freedom for all Americans, not just for Negroes!" Or this passage from the same essay: "Many of us came to college with what we later acknowledged were rather romantic expectations, perhaps mostly unexpressed at first, about what a delight and adventure learning would be. We really did have unanswered questions searching for words, though to say so sounds almost corny." Almost corny?

The $11 Million Loser

Back in November, we noted on this page that Democrat Mark Warner not only outspent Republican John Warner in Virginia's U.S. Senate race, but that in the process he spent more per voter than Michael Huffington had two years earlier in an unsuccessful bid for the Senate in California. Huffington, of course, was widely denounced by the media as the pluperfect plutocratic Republican trying to buy an election. Warner basically got a free ride. Oops, poor metaphor. That ride, the final figures show, cost the Democratic Warner $11 million, not $8.3 million, meaning that Warner spent $3.30 per Virginia voter, a new record for futility and a whopping 62 percent more than the $2.03 per voter Huffington spent.

Neuter This Dog

The Scrapbook thought the ne plus ultra of Christmas-book marketing madness had been achieved several years ago when the counters of our favorite bookseller

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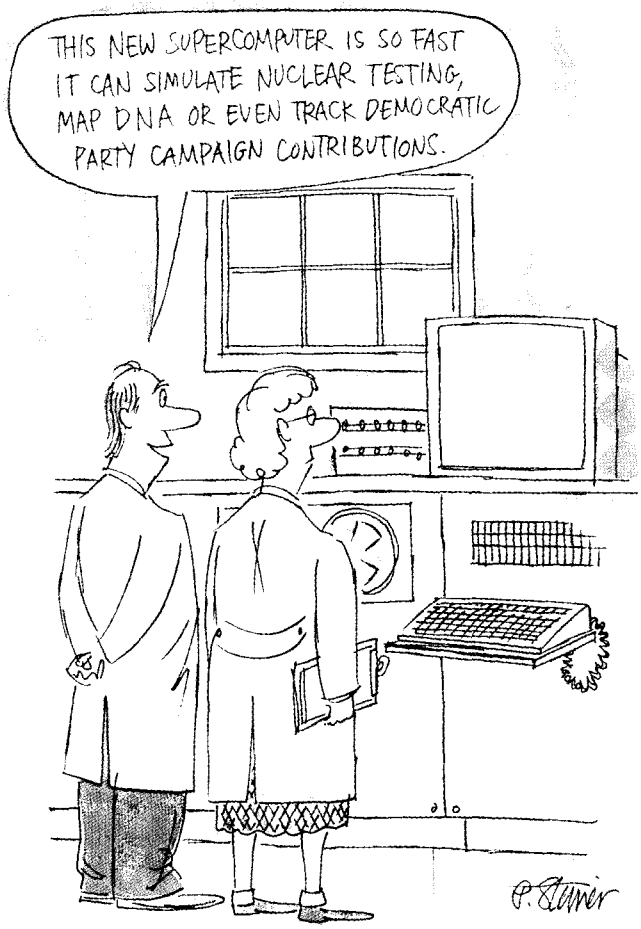

were chockablock with handsome volumes that contained . . . absolutely nothing. The idea was to put your valuables inside the box-disguised-as-a-tome and so thwart burglars. This season, however, brings a title more inane even than an empty box. Andrews and McMeel has just unleashed *Bedtime Stories for Dogs*, a book, its jacket blurb advises, to "make dog owners sit up and beg for more." "The Three Little Pugs," "Snow White and the Seven Chihuahuas," and other such tales "are written just the way dogs like things—they're short and simple, they have happy endings, they usually involve food, and they frequently refer to things that smell really awful." Each story (hold your nose) was "proofed (and woofed) by the author's two wiener dogs."

Yours for $9.95 ($13.95 in Canada, where we like to think sales will be much brisker).

Virtue on Wheels

In an amazing feat of psycho-archaeology, the *Washington Post* Style section last week unearthed several perfectly preserved specimens of a creature not seen since the late 1970s: the Carpool Hero. You remember the Heroes—"good citizens," as the *Post* put it, who have "left their cars at home, saving money, saving the environment," and feeling pretty darned pleased with themselves.

The Heroes were glimpsed riding a van along a recently opened high-occupancy-vehicle, or HOV, lane in suburban Maryland, outside Washington. While the individual commuters crawl bumper to bumper, the Carpool Heroes sail by. They all work for the government, of course, and so can be counted on to keep, shall we say, regular hours. Not for them the complications to which selfish solo commuters succumb—no coming in early, no working late! "It's amazing how many one-person cars there are," tut-tuts one of the car poolers. "People don't want to give up their independence. That's one of the quirks of being an American, I suppose."

Thanks go to the *Post* for bringing us this blast from the past: the HOV honchos, the Carpool Heroes, stuffed in a van and proud of it, quirkless to the last.

The Scrooges of Albany

Further proof of educrat hostility to school choice comes from Albany, New York, where "A Better Choice" (ABC) is offering to rescue 650 kids—an entire student body—from the worst school in the city. Giffen Elementary is a miserable failure, and ABC, with more than a million dollars offered by Virginia Gilder, a New York City investor and philanthropist, is providing its hostages a way out: scholarships for everybody, good for 50 percent of private-school tuition up to $1,000 annually, for three to six years, depending on the age of the student. The program will begin in the next school year.

Giffen parents are responding, naturally, with glee and gratitude. Not so the local education establishment. ABC, said one functionary, will be "cherry-picking some of our best students." (Half of the student body is currently unable to meet the state's minimum reading requirements.) The president of the Albany school board said that the public schools are "the only system that I . . . would encourage students to get into." And a teachers-union mouthpiece (who refers to ABC as "A Big Con") declared, "These people [are] lobbying to take money away from their public schools."

So, thanks to Mrs. Gilder, and with no expenditure of public funds, 650 kids will have a chance for a good education—and the education establishment hates it.

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Casual

Blotting My Copybook

I love books, and I own a ton of them. Not that I've read most of them, but still I love them—the objects. I don't bend back the covers, so that my twice-read copy of *Lucky Jim* hasn't a single crease in the spine. I don't fold page corners to mark my place—the top and sides of my much-thumbed *Tom Jones* are as milky-white as when I bought it in 1983. And when I mark books up, as I always do, I do it in pencil, lightly, so the offending annotations can be erased at some future date, and in a teensy-weensy little script that would doubtless spur hours of productive Freudian analysis.

While I still buy used books, I avoid ones that have been marked or highlighted. An annotated book is a defaced book, is my motto. As I discovered in college, when I last bought scribbled-in books, there's a more temperamental reason for this disinclination. You cannot read a book marked by someone in pen without taking a real dislike to most annotators. Book-markers are vandals to start with, and going *mano a mano* with someone who can't hit back doesn't exactly bring out the best in people.

As I remember it, there were, first of all, the hotheads, who would do little more than register their enthusiastic agreement or disagreement. *"No!,"* their Molly Bloom-style marginalia would run. *"No! Yes! No! Yes! Yes! Yes!"*

Then there were the feminists and various other freelance sex maniacs. They'd take a sentence like "Quentin steered east towards the lighthouse, pulling the rudder firmly towards him and nosing the sloop downwind." And they'd circle nouns and write next to each of them in the margin "= PENIS."

Finally there were the self-taught philologists. Roughly half of used foreign-language books have been previously owned by someone who hopefully told himself, "At the end of this goddamn book, I'm *really* gonna know French," and threw in the towel after 3 or 9 or 13 pages of relentless interlinear scribbling. These books are nearly spotless, but the first three pages contain a string of grubbily scrawled definitions riding above the text like an alternative narrative in pidgin, as in:

Long time go to sleep hour

Longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure.

or an unrelated comic counterpoint, as in:

I have (brought????) more souvenirs from / Milan?

J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans . . .

Halfway through college, I quit buying used books, reckoning it a bad way to save money (= BEER).

Two weeks ago, I broke my rule. I had long wanted to read James Morris's Pax Britannica Trilogy, and when I saw the first volume for $4 in a used book store, I bought it on impulse. It was heavily marked, in pen, but the markings petered out at page 191, and I figured that once I got there it would be smooth sailing. The book had clearly been used for a course, which by the look of the annotations was called something like "Imperialism and Racism: The Anglo-Saxon Way" and given at a *really* lousy college. Take the chapter on the British involvement in Afghanistan. Towards the beginning is written, in big, loopy, dumbo printing, apropos of nothing in particular, *"Akhbar plays on Britian's great shame."* Then a few similarly scribbled-up pages before the professor acquaints the class with his vast range of historical reference. *"Similar to the unplanned and gradual involvement in Viet Nam,"* someone has dutifully written. The coup de grâce comes during the passages describing the horrifying evacuation of Kabul in 1841, when the Afghans basically tortured to death 3,000 Britons and 12,000 Indian camp followers in the freezing cold—disemboweling them, driving stakes through their entrails, chaining children to trees and allowing parents to watch them freeze to death, etc., etc. That passage is marked, *"Brittish were culturally unable to trust the Afgans."*

I wonder what becomes of dopes like this reader. The book reminded me of the rubbish I'd been taught in high school and college and of the rubbish I used to spew out in turn in the margins of my own books. Anyone who saw one of them now would be alarmed to find its annotator had become a journalist. Specifically, I think of a great Irving Howe article I read in 1983. Howe was discussing how he'd been attacked during the Vietnam War by 19-year-old Harvard Maoists who accused him of being a tool of capitalism. One of them even stalked Howe across Harvard Yard, berating him for selling out. After about 15 minutes of this, Howe turned around and said calmly to the heckler, "You know what you're going to be in ten years? *You're going to be a dentist!*"

But you know what? I don't think my annotator is a dentist. I think he probably writes for the *New York Times*.

Christopher Caldwell

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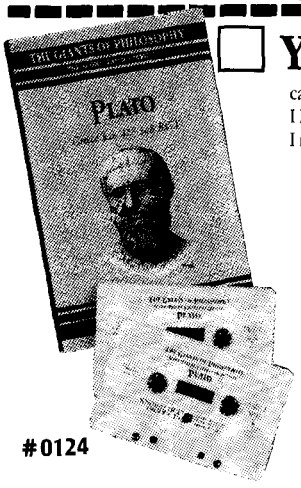

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The West Wing Crusade

In his earnest analysis of James Carville's shameless campaign to discredit independent counsel Kenneth Starr ("James Carville's Crusade," Dec. 16), the normally shrewd Tucker Carlson never even raises the obvious and central question: Did the White House give tacit approval, even encouragement, to this new venture?

One does not need to be a conspiracy theorist to suspect that Carville's sudden campaign was hatched in the West Wing. Virtually all of Carville's charges against Starr (tobacco lawyer, conservative ideologue, Bradley Foundation associate) were first road-tested by the administration during its own, more subtle, crusade against Starr earlier this year. The charge that Starr is a Republican out to get Clinton was made explicitly by the president himself during his "won't-rule-out-a-pardon" interview with Jim Lehrer.

It may be unlikely that Bill Clinton directly ordered Carville to carry out this mission. But what about the president's men? Is it even conceivable that during the countless hours James Carville presumably spends on the phone the idea of an "independent" campaign to smear Ken Starr never came up in conversation with Stephanopoulos, McCurry, Panetta, Ickes, Emmanuel, or even Mrs. Clinton these last few months? Instead of asking about those conversations, Carlson, with no apparent irony, cites the "fact" that Mary Matalin, Carville's most useful publicist, told a friend to write a nasty article about the whole affair.

Is there anyone left who is not susceptible to Carville's wicked charms?

Daniel Casse
Nashville, TN

Why Appease the Chinese?

In "Springtime for Chi" (Dec. 16), Michael A. Ledeen accuses President Clinton of "appeasement" for allowing the sale of American technology to the Chinese military. Ledeen should remember that "appeasement" began when Nixon opened China in 1972 during the Vietnam War.

Since the opening of China, millions of American workers have lost their jobs to Chinese slaves, and the trade deficit with China grows larger each month. With any luck, the Pandora's Box that Nixon opened can be closed. Clearly, if we didn't buy billions of dollars of cheap products made by Chinese slaves, we wouldn't have to sell American technology to the Chinese military in order to reduce the trade deficit.

Stephen Parker
Jackson Heights, NY

Those Zany Lawyers

As a practicing lawyer who has published in student-edited law journals, I read with interest Mark Miller's critique of modern legal scholarship's fixation with attention-grabbing theoretical and doctrinal approaches ("My Sokal-ed Life," Dec. 16). I found myself in agreement with Miller—until the final paragraph of his essay, in which he makes light of the "socially constructed, gender-biased assumptions of 28 U.S.C. 1291." Section 1291 is the federal statute that permits litigants to appeal the ruling of a federal trial court only if the ruling is a "final decision." In solidarity with my woman clients, I have experienced the tyranny of this provision, which imposes on our legal system the masculinist concept of "finality," with all its rectilinear and restrictive implications. To say this is gender-biased—incompatible with the flexible and inclusive principles of femininity—is to state the obvious. One hopes that Miller, as he progresses in his legal career, will begin to exhibit greater sensitivity to the pervasive gender bias infecting our legal system, of which section 1291 is a tragic example.

Eric Grant
Alexandria, VA

Mark Miller is right on target in spotlighting the pompous gibberish that increasingly fills student-edited law reviews, including his own *Georgetown Law Journal*. Unfortunately, one of the submissions he derides, "The Jurisprudence of Yogi Berra," is a spoof written by some of my colleagues here at Loyola Law School and accepted for publication at another law review whose editors evidently have a better sense of humor than the inside-the-Beltway Georgetown types.

The fact that a person as bright as Miller would think this satirical gem serious only illustrates the wisdom of the late Fred Rodell of Yale. In a classic article, Rodell explained that young people who run law-school journals take themselves much too seriously. That much at least has not changed.

Gideon Kanner
Los Angeles, CA

Race and Discrimination

David Frum's "Undiscriminating Discrimination" (Dec. 2) was an excellent appraisal of where misguided laws against discrimination, in addition to unscrupulous lawyers and judges, have led us. There is one corollary conclusion that he omitted: These very laws and their implementation actually foster discrimination. Racism generally does not rear its head when individuals are able to evaluate their peers on a one-to-one basis. But tell citizens that they must accept a designated group at a predetermined value, and they will revolt.

Richard I. Fowler
Penobscot, ME

David Frum laments the spiraling costs of an affirmative-action regime that rewards the legal profession for extending discrimination lawsuits to include age, disability, sexual orientation, and gender. But in proposing that anti-discrimination statutes apply "to race and race alone," Frum fails to address the root problem—the policy presumption of guilt on the basis of skin color.

Instead of affirmative-action policies that assign guilt to whites and injury to blacks without evidence presented in court, why not encourage real victims of discrimination to take their cases to court? A judge and jury can determine any actual harm, victim, and perpetrator in each specific case. Let us once and for all throw away the notion that laws should aim

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to remedy past discrimination, return to our traditional understanding of the courtroom as the redresser of wrongs, and leave the laws to protect the civil equality of all Americans under a colorblind Constitution. In this way, we also prevent quotas—which can limit the advancement of qualified minorities—from functioning as prima facie shields against charges of discrimination.

Private lawsuits have made significant headway against discriminatory employment practices. Businesses can operate more efficiently than can the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. For example, EEOC chairman Casellas was dismayed over the $176.1 million Texaco settlement "done behind closed doors." While he cried, "We were excluded from the process," major corporations were busy calling board meetings to review their employment procedures.

Frum legitimately calls for state and federal statutes that do not consider Americans bigots, as affirmative action does, but he mistakes the legal system for the problem rather than the solution to our discrimination ills. He argues, "If the ideal of anti-discrimination means anything, it means being judged as an individual, not as a sterotyped member of a group." But in the case of alleged discrimination, being judged requires lawsuits, and here is where Americans should call for more, not less. Let us replace presumptions of discrimination with a truly colorblind process wherein no one is presumed a discriminator or victim.

LUCAS MOREL
SILOAM SPRINGS, AR

ACCESS TO AMMO

William Tucker is "sure" that an altercation between his neighbors over a double-parked car would have escalated into bloodshed "if either had had ready access to a gun" ("Maybe You Should Carry A Handgun," Dec. 16). That's why he says the Pennsylvania legislature "acted wisely" when it exempted Philadelphia from a statewide law allowing peaceful people to carry concealed guns.

That access to guns causes violence is quite an amusing idea. Just how do inanimate objects directly influence the brains and muscles of conscious, rational people?

Every November, some 250,000 outdoor enthusiasts (myself included) travel to upper Michigan to hunt deer in the fabled north woods. Each one of them carries a rifle or handgun and is capable of loading and operating the weapon.

At night the hunters flood into local taverns and restaurants to eat, drink, smoke, and maybe watch sports on TV before the next day's hunt. But for some strange reason, the tens of thousands of congregated hunters never shoot their competitors with the weapons and ammunition so accessible.

If the ready availability of guns influences crimes of violence, the rate of violence among target shooters, deer hunters, gun enthusiasts, and gunsmiths should be far higher than it is among the population of non-gun-owners. Surely the little tyrants at the Violence Policy Center by now would have widely publicized the damning statistics.

JERRY WOODRUFF
RALEIGH, NC

William Tucker's recent article promotes a seriously incorrect assumption: that the presence of firearms makes people prone to violence. He supports this claim not with scientific data, but with an anecdotal example.

The Texas concealed-carry bill was introduced by legislators from Houston, one of the largest cities in the country. The reason? Citizens were worried about violent crime and disliked being easy prey for illegally armed criminals. Citizens of high-crime areas such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia are more likely to be victims of violent crime, and as such will be more likely to need a concealed firearm for self-defense. Should we deny them the means to defend themselves on the grounds that they might misuse it? By Tucker's logic we should similarly deny Internet access to the citizens of those cities because .01 percent of them will misuse that technology to distribute child pornography.

KARL REHN
AUSTIN, TX

THE COWBOYS ARE BAD BOYS

In "Liberal Sports: An Update" (Dec. 9) Fred Barnes makes the case that the Dallas Cowboys—"America's Team"—are hated because they are "conservative." Unfortunately, this column appeared during a week when their star defensive player was suspended for a year because of drug violations. The column also appeared during a year when their star wide receiver was suspended for five games as a result of drug violations (following a trial in which he pleaded "no contest" to cocaine possession during an escapade with several females—none of them his wife). Then there is the "divorce/non-divorce/did he commit adultery or not" question asked of the star defensive back/wide receiver. On the field, this is a year when the Cowboys' star running back now regularly runs out of bounds rather than "go the extra yard." Finally, this is a team whose "star" owner violates the spirit, if not the letter, of league-wide endorsement rules that he readily agreed to when he entered the league.

Drugs, sex, and shady financial dealings leave a "very good" team wracked with character problems. Add to the mix a compliant media obscuring real ideological differences. Sound familiar? A clear picture emerges if you replace the phrase "endorsement rules" with "campaign finance laws" in the above paragraph and then make note of the fact that Cowboys owner Jerry Jones is an Arkansas product.

Yesterday's Cowboys like Landry and Staubach—conservative. Today's "Wild Bunch"—Clinton Democrats.

ROBERT A. GEORGE
WASHINGTON, DC

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The Princeton Economic Institute Proposal *for* tax reform & economic growth

1. Abolish the personal income tax; replace it with a 10-percent national retail sales tax.

Abolish the personal income tax and replace it with a 10-percent, national retail sales tax. The products and services not subject to that tax include basic rent on housing, non-prepared food, health care, and medicine. The purchase and sale of stocks, bonds, gold bullion or futures contracts, option or warrants will also be exempt. This will immediately reduce the cost of American labor by 25 percent within the U.S. economy. Furthermore a national retail sales tax will end the discrimination against American citizens, requiring all residents and visitors to pay their portion of the federal tax burden. According to the IRS, 17 percent of the economy is underground, contributing nothing toward the overall well being of the nation. Only a sales tax will capture that revenue.

2. Mandate a 15-percent raise.

Stipulate a 15-percent net increase in take-home pay for every wage earner. This will still result in a 10-percent reduction in the cost of American labor relative to current levels, thereby increasing American competitiveness.

3. Increase excise taxes.

A 10-percent increase in excise taxes including the gasoline tax should be implemented. Surveys have shown, after a retail sales tax, gasoline taxes are the best tolerated by the American public.

4. Implement a low, 2-percent national retail sales tax on real estate.

A national sales tax on real estate of two percent should be imposed. This will be split one percent for the buyer and one percent for the seller. This will apply to residential as well as commercial property. This will result in a drastic reduction from the current capital gains tax situation and eliminate the taxation of the elderly who have accumulated their savings in a large part within their home. This will enable the elderly to sell their home once the children have gone and use part of that equity for retirement by reinvesting in a smaller retirement facility. Currently, such persons are forced to borrow against their homes, which is more cost effective than selling their home subject to capital gains tax rules.

5. Flatten business income taxes.

All business operations, whether partnership, proprietorship, or corporation, will be subject to a flat, 15-percent business income tax. The only deductions from the net tax are research & development, charitable contributions, and $1,000 per employee to encourage job creation. Any business earning more than twice expenses (minus director or owner salaries, loans, transfers, dividends, or pension payments) will be subject to a flat, 25-percent income tax.

6. End all taxes on capital gains, gift and inheritance, and savings and dividends.

7. Repeal the 16th Amendment.

The repeal of the federal government's authority to impose an income tax on American citizens as authorized by the 16th Amendment. Based on previous Supreme Court rulings, business and corporations are still subject to income taxes; these changes do not apply to the states.

8. Make any tax increase expire after four years; subject any increase or continuance to a national referendum.

9. Take Social Security off budget.

Social Security must be taken off budget and allowed to become an honest trust fund where the capital contribution will be reinvested. The agency must be segregated, free from lobbying efforts on the part of the private sector as well as the public sector. The guiding principle must be economic security as implied by the name. No funds held by the Social Security system may be diverted in any way whatsoever by Congress, including restraint upon investment of such funds or mandatory investment in Federal government bonds. A maximum of 50 percent of all funds may be invested in either the private sector or government sector. The fund will be allowed to buy listed stocks with a capitalization in excess of $1 billion. Stocks must be U.S.-based operations only. Any bonds (private, state, local, or federal) must not be of an issue rated less than A+, of foreign origin, or of greater maturity than 10 years.

10. Incorporate a tax amnesty.

Phase I of tax reform includes a tax amnesty program. Anyone who has income that has remained unreported and is currently not in negotiation with the IRS, may come forward and pay a flat, 15-percent income tax without penalty or interest. Those funds will be earmarked to allow the independent establishment of the Social Security trust fund. This will provide the seed capital, allowing the new system to be as secure and honest as any private pension plan as prescribed by law.

11. Balance the budget.

A balanced budget target should be the ultimate goal and spending would be subject to mandatory across the board reduction if interest expenditures exceed 15 percent of total government expenditure, exclusive of Social Security.

Summary

The enactment of this proposal will broaden the tax base. It does not shift the tax base from capital and investment to the working middle class. The elimination of income tax and stable, predictable rates will attract offshore capital into the U.S. The net sum of these points will create the single greatest economic expansion in the history of the United States and perhaps the western world.

For more information, contact the Princeton Economic Institute.

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the weekly Standard

The Asian Money Scandal: A Primer

Tell us quick, President Clinton's defenders demand. Before you begin screaming about the "Asian money" fund-raising scandal dogging the Democratic party and its White House, tell us "what it all means." What sinister conspiracy is involved? What precisely was the quid pro quo? And unless you can identify it, they suggest, you should please shut up.

Stumped? Don't be. To understand this allegedly complicated scandal, it helps to focus on just three stories, each of which is actually rather simple.

1) Yogesh Gandhi and Hogen Fukunaga. Begin with Yogesh Gandhi. He was born "Yogesh Kothari," but claims to be Mohandas K. Gandhi's brother's great-grandson. And he is a very lucky man. As recently as a few months ago, thirteen years after moving to California from his native India, Gandhi was on the skids. He had no assets and no bank account, bill collectors and unpaid former employees were chasing him, he owed back taxes to the state, and he'd lost his driver's license for ignoring a series of traffic fines. Gandhi was a "pauper," according to papers filed in his divorce proceeding.

But in his friendships, Gandhi was rich. One such friendship was with Dr. Hogen Fukunaga, the multimillionaire leader of a Japanese religious sect known as Ho no Hana Sanpogyo. Dr. Fukunaga has magical powers. Following diagnostic examination of the shape of their navels, he has managed to cure people of cancer. Even more amazing, he has managed to get his picture taken with the president of the United States.

At a May fund-raising dinner in Washington's Sheraton Carlton Hotel, Fukunaga and Gandhi awarded Bill Clinton the 1996 "Mahatma Gandhi World Peace Award." The two friends were present to confer this prize because Gandhi had purchased tickets to the dinner with a mammoth $325,000 personal contribution to the Democratic National Committee. And there things stood until October, when the *Los Angeles Times* first reported Gandhi's pauperhood. A few weeks later, the DNC grudgingly determined that its $325,000 had probably never truly belonged to Gandhi. So it returned the money—*to him*. Is this a great country, or what?

2) Charlie Trie and Suma Ching Hai. Several hundred followers of Hue Thi Thanh Wallenstatter must also think it's a great country. They, too, appear to be wealthier for having had their names attached to someone else's financial contributions to Bill Clinton.

Wallenstatter is a Vietnamese-born woman whose murky biography includes residence in a number of countries around the world, India and the United States among them. While working in Germany for the Red Cross, Hue Thi Thanh was married to a "scientist" (Herr Wallenstatter, presumably). But that poor fellow was constraining her spiritual development, so they agreed to a separation, and Hue Thi Thanh wound up in Taiwan, where she now prefers to be known as "Suma Ching Hai," or "Master," or, simply, "She."

Master preaches something called the "Quan Yin Method," which involves "contemplation of the sound vibration." Apart from vegetarianism, Master seems to make minimal demands on Her initiates. According to Her World Wide Web home page, "You will not be asked to join any organization, or participate in any way that does not suit your current life style." But you may want to drink Master's dirty bath water, which is believed to have special curative properties—and you may want to make a $1,000 donation to the Presidential Legal Expense Trust established to help Bill and Hillary Clinton pay attorneys' fees associated with the Whitewater and Paula Jones matters.

On March 21, 1996, Yah Lin "Charlie" Trie, a frequent White House visitor and trade-commission appointee—he chummily calls the president "*Lao Ke*," or "Old Clinton"—arrived at the offices of Michael Cardozo, executive director of the Presidential Legal Expense Trust. Trie was carrying $460,000 in contributions—checks and money orders from ostensibly different sources but with sequential serial numbers and identical handwriting. Cardozo immediately refused

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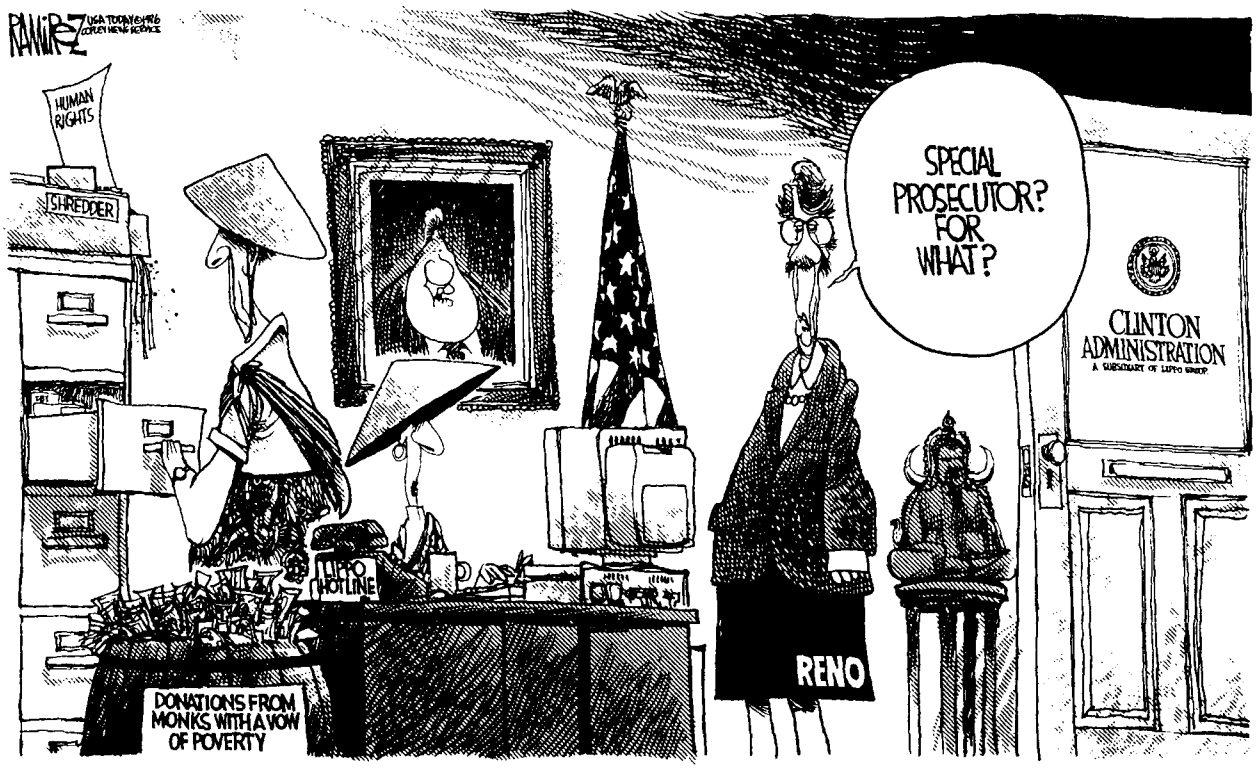

Michael Ramirez

$70,000 as fraudulent or otherwise obviously "deficient." But he had the remaining $390,000 deposited in a downtown Washington bank. Two weeks later, Cardozo met with Hillary Clinton and deputy chief of staff Harold Ickes at the White House to brief them on Trie's unusual gift. They urged caution, which seems to have prompted Cardozo to decline a subsequent offering of $179,000 from Trie.

But it was not until June 26 that the Trust finally decided it could not accept the original Trie boodle. Investigators hired by Cardozo had by then concluded that Trie's 409 "donors," many or most of them followers of Suma Ching Hai, did not have sufficient financial resources to make such contributions. They were probably fronts. The money was probably not really theirs. So Cardozo returned it—*to them*.

3) Man Ya Shih and the Hsi Lai temple. Now, most of the monks and nuns of Los Angeles's Hsi Lai Buddhist temple have not yet had "their" political donations refunded, but that can only be a matter of time. Back in April, with party chairman Don Fowler in the audience and Vice President Al Gore in front of the microphone, the temple was host to a DNC fund-raiser. A hundred-odd monks and nuns, who take vows of poverty and live on stipends of $40 a month, somehow managed to donate a total of $140,000. One of the nuns, Man Ya Shih, later told the *Wall Street Journal* that her own $5,000 check was laundered money; a Democratic activist who did not want to be identified had paid her $5,000 cash in small bills to write the check.

This nun is currently represented by attorney Peter Kelly, former head of the California Democratic party, and she has changed her story. In submissions to the Federal Election Commission prepared for her by Kelly, Man Ya Shih now insists that the $5,000 *was* her money all along. Her *Wall Street Journal* admission was a white lie. She was nervous and wanted to get the *Journal*'s reporter off the phone, you see. So she offered the most innocent explanation she could think of: She told the reporter that she had participated in a felony. Kelly somehow tells this tale with a straight face.

Back to our original question: What does it all mean? Well, all of these questionable transactions, and several questionable others, directly or indirectly involve John Huang, the now-infamous Commerce Department staffer and DNC fund-raiser. By implication, therefore, they involve the billionaire Riady family, owners of Indonesia's Lippo conglomerate and (several of them) friends of the president. Huang began his career at a Lippo-owned Hong Kong bank now half-owned by Communist China's trade ministry

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(and suspected of Beijing-directed commercial intelligence-gathering activity). Huang later became a U.S. citizen working for Lippo in Little Rock. In 1994, he took a $900,000 severance payment and became a deputy assistant secretary of commerce, in which position he maintained frequent contact with Lippo representatives, his friend Charlie Trie, and senior White House staffers.

For most of 1996, after leaving the Commerce Department, John Huang raised soft-money donations for the DNC. He solicited Yogesh Gandhi's contribution. He organized the Hsi Lai temple event. He mysteriously disappeared when reports of his activities first surfaced in the newspapers.

And throughout Huang's tenure in Washington, the Clinton administration did things that made Lippo people happy. The president sent a get-well note to one of Lippo's founding investors. The president sent Ron Brown and U.S. businessmen on overseas trade missions to ink deals with Lippo subsidiaries. The president banned mining of a giant clean-coal reserve in Utah, which—an envelope-pushing report by Paul Weyrich's NET recently pointed out—makes Indonesia's own reserves of environmentally friendly coal suddenly much more valuable on the world market.

Quid pro quo? We do not know yet. And though we would very much like to know, the truth is it really doesn't matter. No one need prove a "quo" to justify pursuit of this scandal, because the "quids" are all so patently illegal. It is illegal for a foreign citizen to make U.S. campaign contributions. It is illegal to disguise the source of U.S. campaign contributions. It is illegal to kite checks and engineer postal-service money orders under bogus names. It is illegal, under the tax code, for a house of worship to host a political fund-raiser.

And it is astounding that the Democratic party, in the face of voluminous *prima facie* evidence of such criminal behavior, continues to reveal its relevant knowledge in misleadingly tiny dribbles—and that the Clinton Justice Department is only now issuing subpoenas in the matter and has yet to call a single witness before a federal grand jury.

Someone's got to uphold the law. No doubt the incoming Republican 105th Congress would like to avoid the public reputation for partisan nastiness that so besieged the 104th. Beginning the new Congress with splashy scandal hearings probably doesn't fit into that plan very well at all. But if the administration continues to evade Lippogate scrutiny, it will be Congress's duty to hold those hearings just the same.

—David Tell, for the Editors

THE WELFARE CONSPIRACY

by P. J. O'Rourke

Ten days before the most charity-soaked of holidays, a story appeared in the *Washington Post*, front page, above the fold, like the Ghost of Christmas Real Time: "Inside Welfare's New World," subhead: "Watching Reform at Work." In this, the threatened "First in a series of occasional articles," reporter Katherine Boo describes the lives of two Washington single mothers.

THINKING THROUGH COMPLICATED REFORMS IS BORING. LET'S HAVE MORE FUN. PSSST, IT'S A LIBERAL PLOT. PASS IT ON.

Elizabeth Jones has resigned from the welfare rolls and gotten a job. Her monthly salary, after taxes, is $1,374. But, because she is employed, her public housing rent has risen from $103 to $497, and her three children have lost their free medical insurance.

LaVerne Peeler is still taking welfare emoluments. She receives, tax free, $2,999 per month in public assistance, food stamps, and foster-care payments. Her public housing rent is $71, and Medicaid benefits remain intact for her six various progeny and wards.

Katherine Boo writes with nice dispassion. Facts and numbers abound in the piece, all of them seemingly correct. As usual, the *Washington Post* knows everything concerning the subject covered except what it's talking about. The point of "Inside Welfare's New World" is supposed to be that reforming welfare is painful. The real point is no such thing. When an Elizabeth Jones gets $1,374 for doing all that society says she should and a LaVerne Peeler gets $2,999 for nothing, welfare shouldn't be reformed, it should be vaporized.

If compassion for the hard-pressed is our motive for welfare, why is someone at the income level of Elizabeth Jones being taxed at all? Why is she further burdened by the regressive exac-

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tions of sales levies, excise charges, customs duties, import quotas, and agricultural price supports?

Or, if redistribution of wealth is our aim, why don't we have a negative income tax? And if what we really want is just to help the poor without getting involved in any messy questions of who's deserving, then how come LaVerne Peeler is poor? She has an income equivalent to a before-tax salary of more than $50,000. Her rent is minuscule. She has an 18-year-old niece and a 16-year-old son in the house who could contribute something. And yet she still exists surrounded by crime and squalor in an environment where $327 is stolen from her purse in her own home. "The money," Katherine Boo tells us, "was meant to forestall an electricity cut-off." Why isn't LaVerne Peeler living over in Georgetown with the liberals who voted her such largesse?

These are tough questions. I suppose we could answer them if we did a lot of difficult research and complicated thinking. But, like the rest of the nation, I'm feeling lazy in this respect. I'd rather do something more modern, more American about the welfare problem—start a bunch of conspiracy theories, like...

. . . AFDC *really* stands for "All Forms of Death Complimentary."

. . . Why call them food stamps if the recipients don't get stomped on?

. . . You can't spell Medicaid without the a-i-d in AIDS.

. . . Welfare is a secret plot by liberals to exploit the poor. Call it The Poverty Plan. Welfare is so huge, so complex, it costs so much, that it must be related to Iran-Contra, the Vince Foster suicide, crashed flying saucers in Roswell, U.N. black helicopters, the Trilateral Commission, TWA Flight 800, the way the CIA invented cocaine and sexually transmitted diseases, and the fact that Tiny Tim has been silenced forever and cannot tell us what he knew about the Kennedy assassination.

Send the following items geek-ward on the Internet and fax them anonymously to talk-radio programs.

THE POVERTY PLAN
Scenario #1

According to a crumpled piece of paper found at a small airport in Mena, Ark., welfare doesn't cure poverty because poor people vote for Democrats. The minute people quit being poor they vote for Republicans. Therefore the purpose of welfare is not to eliminate poverty but to subsidize it, to make sure that no matter how wealthy this country becomes there will always be some poor people left to vote for otherwise unemployable Democrats such as Bill Clinton.

This is why LaVerne Peeler gets lots of money, but only if she keeps acting poor. If she starts being married, employed, and on the lookout for an apartment near Pamela Harriman's house, she'll be cut off without a cent, like certain Arkansas state troopers.

(Wait a minute, this sounds too plausible. Maybe we should save it for the '98 congressional races.)

THE POVERTY PLAN
Scenario #2

The liberals behind welfare aren't really liberals at all. A careful search of Idaho Web sites proves that liberals are actually Communist traitors using social policy the way terrorists use bombs. Liberals want to prove that old-fashioned New Deal half-measures such as public-assistance payments and Supplemental Security Income don't work. Liberals want poverty to get much worse in order to convince a radicalized populace to destroy capitalism. America will be replaced by a Marxist workers' paradise.

Then Elizabeth Jones and LaVerne Peeler will both be sent to the salt mines. Elizabeth is an obvious bourgeois-roader. And LaVerne, making fifty grand a year, is a member of the oppressor class.

THE POVERTY PLAN
Scenario #3

The real purpose of welfare is to get rid of poor people entirely. Everybody knows welfare has bad effects; that's the *point*. Which is why poor people are so much more likely to be put on welfare than rich liberals. And it's no coincidence that poor people are also more likely to be the victims of abduction by extraterrestrials, satanic sacrifice, Gulf War syndrome, and lead-based paint. This is the direct outgrowth of a conspiracy so vast that it has included every president of the United States since FDR (except Ronald Reagan during his first term).

But why, you ask, would liberals do such a thing when it means sacrificing Clinton voters and Communist revolution? The answer—provided to me by a highly placed source whose identity must remain a secret or my car will get keyed—can be given in one word. And it is shocking even to the sensibilities of a hardened conspiracy-theory-type journalist. The answer is: gentrification.

Liberals want to live downtown. All over Ameri-

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ca—in New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Georgetown—there are crowds of liberals living in the gritty, ugly, dirty neighborhoods sensible people are trying to flee.

No one knows why liberals want to live downtown. Maybe they are space aliens who feed upon the carbon monoxide effluents from passing automobiles. Maybe the large storm drains found in urban areas are intended for hatching their larvae. Anyway, liberals can't live downtown if conservatives are filling the city with business—real estate prices will be too high. And liberals can't live downtown if poor people are there, because poor people will smack liberals over the head as soon as The Poverty Plan has been revealed—and maybe even before.

But if welfare gets rid of poor people, why did Bill Clinton—well known to be a secret liberal—sign the Welfare Reform Act? Because the real truth (previously concealed from all but the innermost circle of Washington's all-powerful liberal cabal—even Harold Ickes doesn't know this) is that welfare reform is better for The Poverty Plan than original welfare. Before, if people went off welfare, they lost all their benefits and got shafted—like Elizabeth Jones did. But now, with welfare reform, people can stay on welfare and still lose all their benefits and get shafted—like LaVerne Peeler will. This causes the *Washington Post* to run long front-page articles titled "Inside Welfare's New World." Then poor people read the articles, give up, collapse in a faint, and kick the bucket at last. And notice what Bill Clinton gets out of it—a great big house right downtown. ♦

DEMAGOGUING ABORTION

by Fred Barnes

IN NEARLY FOUR HOURS of preparation for his press conference on December 13, President Clinton devoted only a few moments to reviewing his position on partial-birth abortion. So White House aides were surprised when he mounted a vigorous, lengthy defense of himself on the issue after CNN's Wolf Blitzer raised it. Clinton was emotional. "Hillary and I only had one child," he said. "And I just cannot look at a woman" whose unborn child will die at birth "and tell her that I am signing a law which will prevent her from ever having another child." He sounded defiant: "One of the things the president's supposed to do is to look out for the few hundred against the many millions." But mostly he was cold-blooded and clever.

CLINTON DOESN'T MIND BEING ON THE UNPOPULAR SIDE OF AN ISSUE, SO LONG AS HE CAN BE ON THE POPULAR SIDE AT THE SAME TIME.

Clinton doesn't mind being on the unpopular side of an issue, so long as he can be on the popular side at the same time. Last May, he vetoed a bill outlawing partial-birth abortion, a procedure favored by some doctors that consists of killing an unborn child by sucking out its brains. But he insisted he's really against such abortions, except in a few cases where the mother would suffer severe damage to her health. That argument failed to sway public opinion, which opposes partial-birth abortion by roughly a 3-to-1 margin. To his dismay, Clinton was identified almost solely with the wrong side of the issue. Thus, at the press conference, he renewed his effort to get on the right side as well.

Still, White House aides were surprised he put so much stress on the issue. "Well, it's important," he told them after the press conference. "I did it on purpose." And it may work—in the short run, anyway. "The president is a very skillful communicator," said GOP representative Charles Canady, chairman of the subcommittee that crafted the partial-birth legislation. "He's been somewhat successful in confusing this issue." Many people who opposed the procedure "may accept the president's sham proposal to have a compromise," Canady conceded.

What the White House proposes is an amendment that would exempt from the ban on partial-birth abortion women who might otherwise suffer "severe adverse health consequences." Clinton said he's particularly concerned about "a few hundred women every year" whose unborn children have "terrible deformities" and for whom the partial-birth procedure is needed to "preserve the ability to have further children." At the press conference, Clinton cited the cases of six women who appeared with him when he announced his veto last spring. "I believe that people put in that situation ought not to have Congress tell them that they're never going to be able to have children again," he declared.

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Sounds reasonable, doesn't it? But there are two problems with the Clinton amendment. The first is that the courts have given such a broad interpretation to any health exception that it becomes a loophole allowing an abortion in every instance. "Any sort of health exception gives the ultimate discretion to the abortionist himself," Canady said. The second is that to get the president's signature, the ban on partial-birth abortion must apply only to the third trimester. Clinton "would not go beyond that," according to Leon Panetta, the White House chief of staff. But advocates of the ban contend the procedure is used mostly for abortions in the fifth or sixth month of pregnancy, the second trimester. In those cases, Panetta said on *Meet the Press* on December 15, Clinton "would want a woman to have the right to choose."

The White House is well aware of these problems. Having dealt with abortion as a political and substantive matter for at least two decades, Clinton is extremely knowledgeable about the issue. He knows all the arguments on both sides. Indeed, his basic position, that abortion should be "safe, legal, and rare," embraces both sides. So Clinton is aware of exactly what he's doing in insisting on exceptions to the partial-birth ban. At once, he's able to sound pro-life by opposing partial-birth abortion and pro-choice by demanding qualifiers that make his opposition hollow. By the way, he sticks to these qualifiers even when addressing an anti-partial-birth audience. In response to the candidate questionnaire of the U.S. Catholic Conference last fall, the White House said: "If Congress sends the president a bill that bars third-trimester [partial-birth] abortions with an appropriate exception for life or health, the president would sign it."

No one at the White House expects this to happen. Drafting a bill acceptable to Clinton and pro-lifers would amount to "threading a needle," said a Clinton aide who doesn't expect it to happen. What Clinton realistically wants is one of two things: no bill or one he can blame Republicans for forcing him to veto. Panetta and other White House officials have argued that congressional Republicans would be signaling their refusal to operate in bipartisan fashion if they sent the president a partial-birth bill similar to the one he vetoed. That line hasn't impressed any Republicans. But Clinton has given Republicans pause by positioning himself as 95 percent in agreement with a ban that is being blocked chiefly by Republicans eager to hold on to a useful political issue.

Canady has set no timetable for dispatching another partial-birth bill to the White House. Both he and the chief pro-life strategist, Douglas Johnson of the National Right to Life Committee, believe Clinton has succeeded in muddying the issue. This means anti-abortion forces must spend months casting the issue in clear terms again, beginning with congressional hearings.

One hearing will deal with the question of whether a partial-birth abortion is ever medically necessary. And the White House is bound to be asked to provide evidence on that and other points (it has offered none so far). For now, Clinton has managed to slow down the process of producing a new bill. But the price may be high. He's prolonged an issue that, no matter what he says, is a political loser for him. ♦

WWW. BILLGATES. STINKS

by Matt Labash

Q: How many Microsoft employees does it take to change a lightbulb?

A: None. Bill Gates just redefines Darkness™ as the new industry standard.

—Ubiquitous Internet joke

HE IS SO RICH, his new $40 million mansion's guardhouse costs $900,000. So overexposed, his tote of press mentions in the Nexis database dwarfs that of Dennis Rodman and Pamela Anderson Lee combined. He is the sachem of software, future Lord of the Internet, the world's wealthiest man. And now, Bill Gates, the 41-year-old founder, chairman, and CEO of Microsoft, is angling for a new epithet—Most Loathed.

Gates's omnipresence—with his software running on perhaps 90 percent of the 100 million personal computers around the world, his online/cable news network MSNBC, the bestselling book tours, the convention keynote speeches, the coast-to-coast prophesying and promoting and barnstorming—is inspiring an opposite if not yet equal reaction of Gates-bashing, especially on the Internet. The venue is fitting. With Microsoft's Internet Explorer poised to take the World Wide Web by storm and the company's other Internet tools proliferating like pods from the mother ship, you can now see emerging on the Net a cargo cult in reverse—awash in Gates's technology, the Internet villagers don't worship but revile the man.

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Gates aspires to dominate the Internet with software, but he already dominates it in spirit. There are literally hundreds of anti-Bill sites on the Web, each spewing a different tint of bile: There are the Netizens who rail against Microsoft's rigging the whole game, from operating systems to browsers to content. There are the permanently hostile fans of the Macintosh, who have never forgiven Gates for aping the "look and feel" of their favorite computer and then beating it into submission. There are the libertarian paranoids, who dissect Chairman Bill's many Orwellian pronouncements ("We could reach the point where cameras record most of what goes on in public," he wrote, unconcerned, in *The Road Ahead*, whose new paperback version has just climbed to No. 3 on the *New York Times* bestseller list). Finally, there are the polymorphous Gates-haters who defy classification, except perhaps in the diagnostic manual of the American Psychiatric Association.

Kevin Chadwick

The sites are largely unfair, petulant, virulent, coarse, and deeply, seriously satisfying. Thematically, there is an impressive cohesiveness. Web-site names include the "Microsoft Hate Page," which differs only slightly from the "Official Microsoft Hate Page" (with pictures), "The Official Anti-Microsoft Homepage," "Legions of Microsoft Haters," which is not to be confused with the "National Society of Microsoft Haters" (South Africa Chapter), "Microsoft is Watching," "Microsoft Democracy," and "Microsoft is Shafty"—with Russian, French, and Scottish versions.

There are also more Gates-centric titles like "Bill Gay!" "Why I hate Bill," "Punch Bill Gates" (with a hit count tallying the number of "billionaire software moguls assaulted—5513"), "StopGates" (subtitled "Before he stops you—Welcome, Happy Holidays Friends!"), "Bill Gates Fountain of Dreams" (people recount their Gates dreams, which usually conclude with the dreamer getting fired), "Bill Gates Exploding Head," and "Bill Gates in Hell—Just Some Light Reading," whose narrative begins "Bill Gates dies in a car accident."

Gates paraphernalia includes phony computer programs like "Microsoft Bill," which comes "with a free subpoena attached from all major software manufacturers who may be plagiarized by your use of this program." His book is renamed *The Toad Head* and compared to *Mein Kampf*. And in case the point is muffled, Gates is pictured in the Führer's outfit with a Microsoft armband.

His wife is called "wallet chaser" and "pocket protector," he is called a "gangster," "Big Brother," a "robber baron," and "Rainman." And when somebody truly wishes to deliver a low blow to the one-time programmer, as columnist Robert X. Cringley did in an online interview, he simply says Gates "hasn't written code since 1983. . . . He's a businessman."

Online joke collections are scrupulously subdivided into Bill Gates, General Microsoft, MS-Doze, Windows NT, etc. Light-bulb jokes are a staple:

Q: How many Microsoft support staff does it take to change a light bulb?
A: Four. One to ask, "What is the registration number of the light bulb?" One to ask, "Have you tried rebooting it?" Another to ask, "Have you tried reinstalling it?" And the last one to say, "It must be your hardware because the light bulb in our office works fine."

There are also higher-concept sites like the "Why Bill Gates is Richer Than You" page, which notes numerous similarities in concurrent *New Yorker* pieces, one on Bill Gates, the other on autism (Gates often rocks back and forth when conversing). From the Gates piece: "He has planned a full-size trampoline for the house he is building." From the autism piece: "The home of one autistic family had a 'well-used trampoline, where the whole family at times likes to jump and flap their arms.'"

Another site constructs scenes with Gates as the "new ruler" of NBC, casting himself in all the hit shows:

From Friends*:*
RACHEL: *"Bill, you're such a dork!"*
BILL: *"You're fired."*

From Seinfeld*:*
BILL: *"Let's make this show about something."*
JERRY: *"You can't. The show is about nothing."*
BILL: *"You're fired."*

Like termination and autism, Satan is a recurring motif. One picture includes a pentagram with the Microsoft logo in the center, and there are Web sites

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like "Proof Bill Gates is the Devil" and "Proof Bill Gates is the Antichrist." The latter is one of the more elaborate efforts arguing that Gates may be Lucifer's trainbearer. When assigning numeric computer-language ASCII values to each letter of Gates's name, then adding "three" for William Gates III, you arrive at the mark of the beast, 666. (This theory is gaining currency among the end-times adepts of the evangelical community; professional apocalypticians like Dr. Jack Van Impe have noted that Gates's ghostwriter has come out in favor of "a permanent, wearable recording device which would be turned on at all times and store every conversation one has"—Antichrist technology, for sure.)

Microsoft did not respond to numerous requests for reaction to this Gates-hating frenzy, though its lawyers are usually pretty good about getting in touch with poison-pen Web authors like the one who's been posting "The Secret Diary of Bill Gates," in which "Gates" lists his top ten Microsoft innovations, including "predatory pricing, the Nerd interview, ruthless competition, competitor crushing and kicking them when they're down."

I turned instead to Jack Shafer, deputy editor of *Slate* (Microsoft's online magazine). Speaking from the Microsoft campus in Redmond, Wash., Shafer dismissed the whole Gates-bashing phenomenon "as the pure psychological frailty of envy. . . . I think if any of these people put half the effort into creating software products that they did into their hate-Gates sites, maybe they could make some money, too."

But surely there is more to the deep vein of aggression that has turned Gates-bashing into a near full-contact sport, with competitors, even on the record, calling Gates "a squirt" and equating dealings with him to being "raped." Lotus president Jeffrey Papows has revealed he and Sun Microsystems president Scott McNealy are "co-captains of the I-hate-Bill-Gates fan club. We just couldn't decide which of us hates him more." And an IBM official once said that he "would like to put an ice pick in Gates's head."

To his many enemies, Gates represents a historic olio of industrialist-inspired ill will—embodying the monopolistic aggressiveness of John D. Rockefeller, the naked ambition of Donald Trump during his decadent "short-fingered vulgarian" phase (as *Spy* dubbed it), and the hygienic negligence of Howard Hughes. There is also the fact that Gates, in the words of one industry source, is "a total honkin' dork." To critics, this cannot be exaggerated—and not just because of the obvious (Gates's anachronistic, bowlish thatch of hair, unstyled in the manner of Franciscan-monk-cum-Turtles-tambourine-man). Cull the voluminous record, like the seminal Gates-bashing biography *Hard Drive*, and Gates's dorkiness is a charge easily substantiated:

He used to eat unmixed Tang powder while writing computer programs. He has persistent dandruff. His mother color-coordinated his clothes (blue days, beige days) until he was well into his twenties. Isaac Asimov is among his favorite writers. His pick-up lines have included asking a girl what she made on her SATs. He used to watch videotaped physics lectures on Saturday nights. His handlers have had to schedule haircuts for him on photo-shoot days, since that is the only way they can be sure his oft-greasy locks will be washed.

Allow for the fact that most Net denizens don't have handlers, and what you see here is a taxonomically precise description of 80 percent of all Netheads. In other words, Gates loathing is a disguised form of self-loathing.

And here is the corollary: As long as self-obsession endures, the Internet will be overrun with Gates-obsession. The greatest geek ever will haunt all the lesser geeks. As Douglas Coupland put it in his novel *Microserfs*, Gates will be "semi-visible, at all times, kind of like the dead grandfather in the Family Circus cartoons. Bill is a moral force, a spectral force, a force that shapes, a force that molds. A force with thick, thick glasses." ♦

The NAACP's Parent Trap

by Nicole Garnett

"It never ceases to amaze me," Justice Clarence Thomas has observed, "that the courts are so willing to assume that anything that is predominantly black must be inferior." Sadly, the Milwaukee National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is now asking yet another court to endorse just that insidious and patronizing assumption. Only this time, the all-black institutions at issue are the result not of intentional segregation, or even of housing patterns created by "vestiges" of discrimination, but of the free choices of black parents.

The NAACP recently interjected itself into litigation involving Wisconsin's groundbreaking school-

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choice program. The program gives up to 15,000 poor children educational vouchers to spend at a wide array of private schools. Ninety-six percent of the students participating in the program are minorities. The Milwaukee *Community Journal*, the city's largest African-American newspaper, finds that 90 percent of the black community supports the program.

Nevertheless, the NAACP argues that school choice violates the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Why would a policy designed to benefit poor, predominantly minority, children violate equal protection? The NAACP compares the voucher program to the efforts of southern states to thumb their noses at desegregation during the period of massive resistance by sending white kids to private schools. According to the NAACP, some of the parents using vouchers choose to send their children to "virtually one-race schools," and "racially separate schools are inherently unequal."

Comparing the predominantly black private schools that upset the NAACP to the segregation academies in the South insults the intelligence of minority parents across the nation who are deciding in increasing numbers that inner-city private and religious schools provide an education far superior to the public alternatives. And no wonder. Only 35 percent of the freshmen who entered public high schools in Milwaukee in 1992 graduated in four years (in one school, only 13 percent did so). Contrast this abysmal record with the record of two predominantly black private schools in Milwaukee: The high school graduation rate both for students at Messmer High School, an independent Catholic school, and for alumni of Urban Day, a K-8 independent school, is 98 percent.

The success of predominantly black private schools is not the only irony of the NAACP's effort to thwart school choice. Many of the private and religious schools in inner-city Milwaukee are more integrated than their public counterparts, some of which are virtually all black. Vouchers will further integrate private schools by making them affordable for poor parents. While some black parents use their vouchers for schools that are mostly one race, many others choose an integrated environment. School vouchers, therefore, can actually advance the NAACP's goal of integrated education.

Apparently, however, the NAACP is more interested in curtailing poor parents' choices than in promoting integration. It not only wants to prohibit black parents from choosing predominantly black private schools, but thinks that they must be stopped from selecting religious schools too. The NAACP's belittling of black parents is most glaring when it characterizes school choice as "compelled worship." Observing that most religious schools in Milwaukee are Roman Catholic and Lutheran and that most black parents are not, it argues that permitting black parents to use vouchers in those schools is tantamount to forcing them to worship there.

This suggestion—that black parents need the state to protect them by limiting their ability to expose their children to diverse religious traditions—is a slap in the face for the parents. What these parents recognize is that many religious schools have long records of successfully educating minority students. Contrary to the NAACP's opinion, parents like Val Johnson (a Pentecostal Christian who has sacrificed to send all five of her children to Catholic school) have good reasons for wanting their children in religious schools: Johnson lists concerned teachers, discipline, and high academic standards. Her kids' religious upbringing, she notes, is her prerogative.

If there are limits to the NAACP's audacity, they have not yet been reached in the Wisconsin litigation. In addition to insults aimed at black parents, at private schools, and at a program that it characterizes as the "tyranny of [the] majority," the NAACP relies on a highly developed entitlement mentality. It suggests that the choice program may violate the Voting Rights Act of 1965, reasoning that, because school-board districts are drawn so as to guarantee blacks seats on the board, any program that transfers students to private schools not supervised by the school board will "dilute" black votes. Finally, it complains that when students leave for private schools, "teaching opportunities in Milwaukee Public Schools for African-Americans will contract." These desperate arguments highlight the perversity of group-think taken to an extreme. The NAACP seems to care more about maximizing both its own influence over the Milwaukee school board and the number of black teachers in public schools than it does about educating the children most in need.

The NAACP has a long and distinguished history of fighting for increased opportunity. It should wholeheartedly endorse a reform effort that empowers poor minority parents by opening the doors of good schools to their children. Instead, it clings to the status quo, claiming despite the abysmal failure of public schools that "African Americans and other racial minorities especially benefit from implementation of uniformity of educational opportunity by a government official." In doing so, it abandons its heritage and the poor black children that it claims to represent.

Nicole Garnett is a staff attorney for the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Justice, which litigates nationwide for school choice.

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MIDNIGHT IN THE GARDEN OF FACT AND FICTION

An Investigation into a Publishing Sensation

By Daniel Wattenberg

"The half hour before midnight is for doin' good," according to Minerva, the voodoo witch in John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. "The half hour after midnight is for doin' evil." And these days in Savannah, Ga., the setting for Berendt's many-layered non-fiction tale of an insular southern city's secrets, the rest of the time is for doin' business.

Before publication in February 1994, commercial expectations for *Midnight* were modest. The first printing was a moderate 25,000 copies, but as booksellers quickly talked it up to their customers, and delighted readers talked it up to other readers, *Midnight* became a word-of-mouth smash. It entered the *New York Times* bestseller list in March 1994 and has been there, with a few gaps, ever since—134 weeks in all, 78 printings, and no end in sight. Over 1.1 million hardcover copies are in print. And almost three years after publication, no date has even been set for release of a paperback edition. *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* is, without a doubt, the publishing sensation of the decade.

Midnight has become a Macarena for middlebrows, a cultural-commercial craze whose epicenter is Savannah. In the storied old port city, it is now called, simply, "The Book." Random House publicist Pamela Cannon says The Book has stimulated a 46 percent increase in tourism to Savannah and added 24 new businesses and 1,500 new jobs to the local economy.

One local bookshop alone has sold 15,000 copies of The Book. Clint Eastwood, soon to begin directing the movie version, dropped by John and Ginger Duncan's map-and-print store on Monterrey Square to view John's slide show based on The Book. The Duncans have sold 6,000 copies. "We sold 33 yesterday," said Ginger, clutching a fistful of dollars. A shop called The Book is dedicated exclusively to the sale of *Midnight* epiphenomena. A local news documentary about the book is screened in the front room. A recording of the book's elderly pianist/singer Emma Kelly plays on the cassette deck elsewhere. The audio-cassette version of *Midnight* plays in the back room, also the home of the childhood library of Jim Williams, the Savannah host-with-the-most whose four trials for murder form the heart of the narrative. And prominently displayed alongside signed copies of The Book are copies of *Hiding My Candy*, the autobiography of Lady Chablis, the local drag queen made famous by The Book. For *Hiding My Candy*, the 8th-grade dropout pocketed a $100,000 advance from Simon and Schuster.

And the two distinctive visual icons associated with the book—the "Bird Girl" statue on the cover and the façade of Mercer House, Williams's lovingly restored Italianate mansion—have assumed a multiplicity of merchandisable forms in the shop: postcards and breast pins, tie clips, watercolors, note cards, and coffee mugs.

Midnight has so reawakened interest in the songs of Savannah-bred Johnny Mercer, whose images of moonlit southern mildness form a recurring motif in The Book, that a New York impresario has staged an eight-city "Midnight in the Garden" Jazz Tour dedicated to Mercer's music. Catching up with it in Jacksonville, Fla., on a Tuesday night, I found a sellout crowd of thousands transfixed by the concert of Mercer songs keyed to readings from The Book by Berendt, Chablis, and others. The sound system fed back and Chablis flubbed some lines, but for a jazz concert based on a prestige book, the midweek sellout was impressive. After all, we do not listen to jazz *or* read books anymore in America. Much less in Jacksonville.

Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil deserves its astonishing success. It is compulsively readable, a fascinating mix of an *In Cold Blood*-style true crime story, a comedy of manners, and a wonderful evocation of the eccentricities, beauties, and legends of a grand old city gone to seed and then reborn.

Daniel Wattenberg is a contributing editor at George. *His article "Was Punk Rock Right Wing?" appeared in the August 26 issue of* The Weekly Standard.

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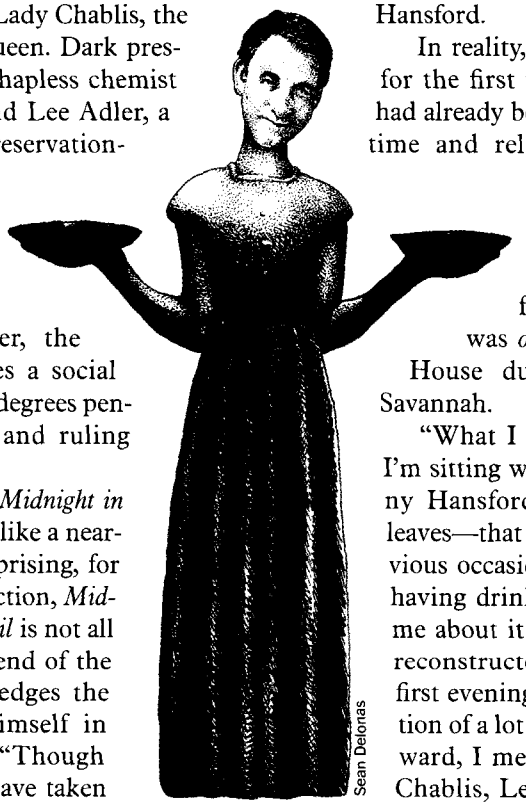
The Book is a murder mystery nested in a framework of interlocking character sketches. Williams, a gay antiques dealer with a discerning eye and an acid tongue, is accused of murdering his young lover, Danny Hansford. Williams's humble country beginnings are lacquered under an aristocratic finish acquired during decades of restoring Savannah's neglected architectural splendors and picking through the auction houses of the world for priceless *objets d'art*.

The second male lead is Joe Odom, the charming scapegrace who keeps his sang-froid in hot water: former tax lawyer, cocktail pianist, squatter in temporarily unoccupied mansions, a Rhett Butler for our time. Odom's love interest is "Mandy," a big-haired lounge singer and voluptuous ex-beauty queen once crowned Miss BBW (Big Beautiful Woman) in Las Vegas.

Low comedy is provided by Lady Chablis, the self-mythologizing black drag queen. Dark presences—like Luther Driggers, a hapless chemist with a vial of deadly poison, and Lee Adler, a crass, self-promoting historic preservationist—are offset by light ones (Emma Kelly, the sweetly self-sacrificing elderly piano player Mercer dubbed the "Lady of 6,000 Songs"). And Berendt himself is a character, the bewitched outsider who secures a social niche in the Odom circle and by degrees penetrates the city's secular rites and ruling myths.


Sean Delonas

John Berendt

A completely original work, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* reads like a near-great novel. And that is not surprising, for although it is classified as non-fiction, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* is not all fact. In an author's note at the end of the book, Berendt openly acknowledges the fictional license he allowed himself in manipulating time sequences: "Though this is a work of non-fiction, I have taken certain story-telling liberties, particularly having to do with the timing of events. Where the narrative strays from strict non-fiction, my intention has been to remain faithful to the characters and to the essential drift of events as they really happened."

But while the grumbling of the publicity-shy Savannah aristocracy about the book's spilling of secrets has occasionally amused the press, little attention has been paid to the secrets of the author's story-telling liberties in his book. Have these liberties been limited to the timing of events, as Berendt suggests? Or did he take additional liberties with character and context?

One of the risks of taking fictional storytelling liberties with the representation of real people in a work of non-fiction is that it may create containment problems down the road. What is an author to do if one of his characters revolts against her fictionally modified alter ego and insists on telling the truth?

II

Berendt freely discussed with me the book's most structurally significant chronological alteration: the illusion that his own years in Savannah coincided in time with the the entire saga of Jim Williams's arrest and four trials for the murder of Danny Hansford.

In reality, Berendt did not meet Williams for the first time until 1982, after Williams had already been convicted of murder the first time and released pending appeal. What's more, Berendt did not move to Savannah to collect material for his book until 1985—after Williams's *second* conviction for the murder. In fact, Williams was *out* of jail and living in Mercer House during Berendt's five years in Savannah.

"What I did in the first chapter—when I'm sitting with Williams and in comes Danny Hansford, screams, takes a drink, and leaves—that had actually happened on a previous occasion," Berendt explains. "Jim was having drinks with somebody else. Jim told me about it and so did somebody else. So I reconstructed it, put myself in there. The first evening in Mercer House is a combination of a lot of stories he told me. Then afterward, I meet all these people—Joe Odom, Chablis, Lee Adler. I met all these people, obviously, after the murder, but they don't impact the murder at all, so I simply put them right after my meeting with Jim, and it *seems* as though I met them before the shooting and I didn't, but so what? All of those meetings with people were actual meetings. They took place in '85 or later, and they are pretty much verbatim what happened with those people and me."

Berendt concludes somewhat mysteriously: "I, in fact, am the only fictional character in the book until I catch up with myself."

I had no reason to doubt the truth of his remark

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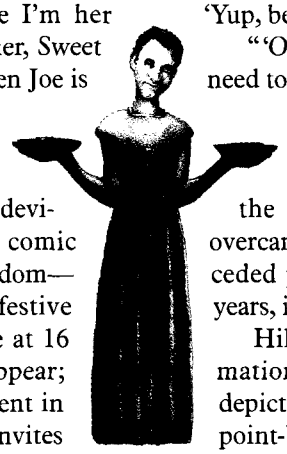
until I met Nancy Hillis. Nancy Hillis appears in the book as "Mandy." The Judy Hollidayish character is painted into Berendt's canvas during her daily commute. She drives to Savannah from her (fictionalized) home in Waycross, Ga.—with her *knees*, while layering her face in bright makeup, doing her hair and nails, and watching her soaps on the television on the seat next to her.

In the book, Mandy is the love interest of the thrice-married Joe Odom, the charismatic lady-killer whom Berendt has called "the glue," the "link" in the narrative architecture. The two are lovers and are to be wed. Joe calls Mandy his "fourth wife in waiting"; only her pending divorce is holding the marriage up. But, explains Joe Odom, "there's no telling when that will happen, because her attorney's a lazy cuss who hasn't gotten around to filing the papers yet. I guess we can't complain about it, though, because I'm her attorney." The two open a nightspot together, Sweet Georgia Brown's, which ultimately fails when Joe is evicted for non-payment of rent.



Nancy Hillis says Berendt's portrayal of Mandy, Joe, and their relationship deviates in important ways from the truth. The deviations begin with the book's delightfully comic account of Berendt's introduction to Joe Odom—through Nancy/Mandy—and the festive entourage centered in Odom's townhouse at 16 East Jones Street. Mandy is the first to appear; she arrives at the door of Berendt's apartment in search of ice. After getting acquainted, she invites him to accompany her back to Joe's nearby house, a source of honky-tonk music and all-hours merriment that has aroused Berendt's curiosity.

"I certainly didn't meet [Berendt] the way he has it in the book," Nancy Hillis told me. "I met him because he was best friends with Joe Odom and he was one of Joe's entourage. I never knew Joe when he lived on Jones Street, which is where he has me entering. I didn't meet [Joe] until he lived on 101 East Oglethorpe." (Readers will remember this last address: It was the house Odom surreptitiously occupied while its owner was away in Europe.)

I asked Berendt whether the meeting happened as described in the book. "Not exactly, no," he hedged. "It didn't happen that way. . . . You see, somebody else came to me with the bit about the ice and the electricity." The truth is somewhat more prosaic: Berendt met her *through* Joe Odom, a contact in Savannah provided to Berendt by a mutual friend before the writer ever arrived in town.

More important, Hillis says that "the romantic relationship between Joe Odom and me just didn't exist." She says they never planned on getting married: "We were business partners and I loved him dearly like a brother." Odom would have made an odd choice for a husband, she explains, given that she understood what was obvious to those in Joe's circle: Joe was not strictly heterosexual.

"I always knew that Joe did not like girls," Hillis says. "It's just something you knew. Joe did not, I don't think, think of himself as homosexual, but he certainly dabbled in that neck of the woods. It's not that simple, because some people don't wear their sexuality on their sleeve. And we did not have a relationship that I found it my business to ask him. I already knew.

"I know some of the things he said. For instance, a very good-looking guy came in and Kathleen, who was our cocktail waitress and managed our bar, and I both just went, 'Goodness, he's so good looking! Joe goes, 'Yup, best I ever had,' and we went, 'What?'

"'Oh, yeah, girls, he's left-footed: Y'all don't need to be looking over there.' Those were his exact words. Now what would you think?"

Joe Odom died in 1991, and his death certificate identifies "H.I.V. infection" as the underlying cause of the pneumonia that overcame him. Although Odom's AIDS death preceded publication of *Midnight* by more than two years, it is not recorded in the narrative.

Hillis believes Berendt suppressed this information because it would have complicated his depiction of Odom as a heterosexual. "I have been point-blank asked by people . . . , 'When and why did Joe die?' And I say a disease that a lot of my friends died of, and that's AIDS. I try to be just as nice as I can . . . but I'm not gonna lie. And John can't stand that."

According to Hillis, the author tried to conceal the cause of Odom's death at a public discussion of the book in Savannah. "He was asked the question from the audience, 'What did Joe die of?' And he said, 'Some sort of cancer, maybe leukemia.'"

When I asked him about the omission of Odom's death, Berendt replied, "First of all, I couldn't get that information." He then added a reason that rendered the first answer moot: "Joe was alive when the book ends. The book was over when Jim [Williams] dies, and Jim died years before Joe. He didn't die in the span of time the book covered. So that's the end of that one."

That *would* be the end of that one if *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* were a conventional non-fiction narrative. But Berendt liberally compresses radically varying timespans to make them appear contemporaneous in *Midnight*. For example, a character

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named Serena Dawes interacts with Berendt in the book despite the fact that the real-life model for Serena died in 1974, more than a decade before the author's move to Savannah.

So maybe the question of why Odom's death was omitted should be left open.

In my interviews with him, Berendt quickly conceded the question of Odom's sexual orientation. "He was bisexual," Berendt said, and appeared to claim, alternately, that he had misperceived the relationship between Nancy Hillis and Joe Odom—and that his omission of the other side of Odom's sexual identity was a permissible exercise in dramatic selectivity. "The gay part of his life is absolutely uninteresting," Berendt said.

"By the end of my being in Savannah, I knew that [Hillis and Odom] were not at all [romantically involved], they weren't even speaking," Berendt told me. "First, I was under the impression that there was some romantic stuff. Joe could easily go to bed with women and did. And I thought that that's what was going on. And when I portrayed their relationship I seized on that part of their knowing each other. That I will concede, that it did not continue that way, and I now wouldn't be surprised to learn there was no sex. Here the portrayal of them is what I would say is of a short period of time—the way I saw it—and indeed may not be correct even for that time. That license there—I thought that that was kind of a nice story. That's more license than I took with any other characters."

Hillis thinks that extra-literary calculations were at work, that Berendt made Joe heterosexual and coupled him with her to keep *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* from being dominated by characters from the city's gay subculture and thus relegated to a gay marketing ghetto. It is true that the book is drenched in the gay subculture. Its central event is the shooting of a young gay man and the four trials of his older male lover on the charge of murder. A drag queen is perhaps its most memorable supporting character.

So if Odom, too, had been portrayed as gay, perhaps that would have upset the delicate balance Berendt strikes in the book between gay and straight Savannah, upper crust and demi-monde. It is also true that Savannah is home to a thriving gay community. The book touches on the important early role of the gay community (discreetly referred to as the city's "bachelors") in the restoration of the city's historic district. But for the most part, the story's gay characters are not viewed as residents of a gay world. The author seems most comfortable alluding to the city's gay life through kitschy indirection, like his references to a prominent Savannah resident's efforts to spy on Williams's annual gentlemen-only parties.

At first, some things Berendt told me seemed to lend credence to Hillis's theory that he had masked Odom's sexual identity behind a heterosexual relationship with Hillis to balance out the book's other characters. "There was certainly enough in the book already on the subject of homosexuality, with the black drag queen and the gay murder," Berendt said, "and it wasn't strictly required of me to bring that out in someone who'd been married three times, and his homosexuality was not really a factor in the time I met him."

But later, Berendt hotly denied heterosexualizing Odom for commercial reasons. "No one can accuse me of shying away from the theme except possibly you," he said. "Random House was not concerned about the gay aspect of it, because they didn't think it was a 'gay book' as such. It's got gay material in it for sure, and I think it's really stretching the point to suggest that I didn't put in all the gay things because I didn't want to overdo it and make it a 'gay book.'"

But to Hillis, no other explanation makes as much sense. "Now that he's acted so ugly, I've asked myself, 'Why did he put me in the book? If he despises me this much? Why did he make me famous?' And as I sit back and reflect, it's got to be because he needed me to make it a rounded book and sell to a larger audience. It was a business decision."

III

Did she say "ugly"? According to Hillis, Berendt's behavior toward her since the book's publication has been characterized by rude slights that have escalated into personal warfare both open and covert. She cites many examples.

"What's she doing here?" Berendt demanded as he turned his back on Hillis when she appeared at his discussion of the book in Savannah. (The organizer of the event, Jeannie Sims of a firm called At Your Service, confirmed Hillis's account.) The author reduced Nancy's mother's elderly caretaker to tears in an angry phone call in which Berendt threatened to take Hillis to court for producing a tour map of Savannah related to the book (the caretaker took the call because Hillis was absent from the house). And he has spread unkind gossip about her to reporters and mutual friends.

Some of this behavior she writes off as the result of a specific grudge: She says Berendt thinks she turned Joe Odom in to the authorities for forging her name on bad checks against her account. (She denies ratting out Odom.) But she attributes much of Berendt's hos-

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tility to a vindictive effort to marginalize and punish her efforts at literary whistle-blowing.

As is true with most contretemps between two people, it is difficult to determine the precise accuracy of certain stories; it also may be that the stories are accurate, but perceptions are awry. Take Hillis's account of an encounter between them before a taping of the Oprah Winfrey show. "When I showed up at *Oprah*, he tried to tell me what to say," she recalls. "He said he didn't want me bringing up that Joe and I didn't have a relationship. The way he said it was, 'If she asks you any questions about you and Joe getting married, just laugh and say, 'Oh, Joe was gonna marry everybody.'

"I said, 'No, I don't think so, John.'

"He said that it is not imperative to the book. He said [the producers] don't want any 'negativity.' I said, 'I've never been negative.' He said, 'Well, you don't follow the story line, and that's negative.'"

One could interpret Berendt's behavior as an innocent act of cajolery, whose purpose was to induce Hillis to conform to his literary portrait of her and Odom. Hillis, however, thinks Berendt was edging toward unseemly pressure tactics. "He tried to convince me that he was the reason I got asked to be there, and I should listen to him," she recounts. "He said, 'I talked to them about you coming.' But I could tell when I walked in the room he was shocked I was there. He thought it was just he and Chablis."

Berendt agrees he was utterly surprised to find Hillis preparing to appear on the show, but rejects the rest of her account. "When she showed up, she said, 'What am I gonna say if they ask if we had a love affair?' I said, 'Say whatever you want, you were involved at first for sure.' That's all I said." He said it was "absolutely not true" that he told Hillis he had gotten her the *Oprah* booking.

Hillis interprets another encounter with Berendt at another media event—in Savannah before a taping of *Good Morning America*—as a veiled attempt at blackmail. She said Berendt, in a whisper, purported to have knowledge of a specific private incident in her life. Hillis interpreted the remarks, made in the moments before a taping for national television, as an implied threat of public exposure. "It was meant to scare me away, meant to make me run," she says. Berendt remembered the encounter but said he never mentioned the private incident to her, in a whisper or otherwise, though he did mention it twice to me in the course of one interview. Hillis denies the private incident ever happened in the first place, and ultimately, Berendt told me he would not challenge Hillis's denial.

Even so, Berendt makes no effort to conceal his distaste for Nancy Hillis. "Be careful," he warned me, "because she has had problems with the law, and she's also had problems with the truth." He would not go on the record with details about her alleged legal problems because of his lack of firsthand knowledge, but accused her of misbehavior. "She's carrying on a war with everybody," he said. "She's been telling everybody that all the books in Savannah that are signed by me in all the bookstores are fake signatures and I didn't sign them." Then he asked: "Do you know anyone else who would do something like that?"

He also said Hillis had charged a premium for his signature on the copies of *Midnight* she sold from her store, a practice he considers "dishonest." He finally stopped signing her books when she persisted despite his warnings to stop: "At that point, someone told me she was forging the signature. I said, 'Nancy, I don't know if it's true. If it is, stop it.'"

Since this article concentrates on the claims of one significant character about the misrepresentation of herself and a now-deceased major character, it is far from an exhaustive investigation of the reliability of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* as a whole. Berendt, a one-time writer for Dick Cavett who edited *New York* magazine for two years in the 1970s, reminded me of this article's limited scope. "You really haven't done a thorough investigation of the accuracy of the portrayal of the characters, except for Nancy, who has an ax to grind," he said after rattling off a list of other characters in the book who have not challenged the accuracy of his portrayals.

"You really do not have the standing to do what you seem to be doing," he continued. "You've got to talk to all those people. I now take exception to this, because you have just spoken to one disaffected person and I'm willing to tell you that I took a moment in her relationship with Joe and seized on that, but you've got to now talk to all the others. I will personally object if you don't. . . . If you are going to report on her complaints with me, that's certainly fair enough, but you also have to say that you didn't talk to any of the other major characters."

Fine. Here's the rundown: Jim Williams and Joe Odom are both deceased, so I could not talk to them. Lee Adler, Williams's rival, declined to be interviewed. I did talk to Dorothy Williams Kingery, Williams's sister, who challenged Berendt's funny account of her brother's efforts to carry on his antiques business after his murder conviction without letting business associates know that he was calling from jail. (Berendt said Williams himself was the source of this account, which he later corroborated with a source in Europe whom Williams called on business while in

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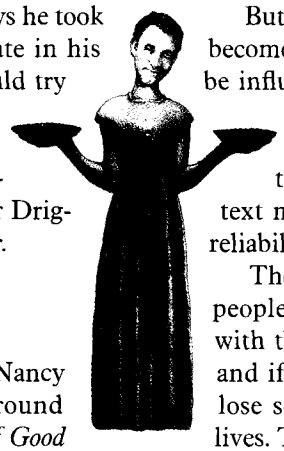
jail.) She also called the author's account of her brother's reliance during his legal battles on Minerva, the voodoo queen, "greatly overdrawn."

"How would she know?" Berendt responded. "She wasn't even in Savannah then. . . . I wouldn't say I embellished it much."

I also talked to Spencer Lawton, the district attorney who prosecuted Williams. "There's a great deal about the conduct of the Williams case that [Berendt] either missed because he was unaware of it, or chose to miss," Lawton said. He is depicted in the book as something of a bumbler who, it is insinuated, prosecuted Williams for murder rather than lesser charges at the instigation of his largest campaign contributor, Lee Adler.

Lawton declined to provide a detailed critique of the author's account of the case; Berendt says he took particular pains to be scrupulously accurate in his account of the Williams legal case and would try to respond to any specific claims Lawton might make about inaccuracies. I made no attempt to interview Chablis, or singer-pianist Emma Kelly, or the chemist Luther Driggers, or Sonny Seiler, Williams's trial lawyer.



IV

Has any real harm been done, even to Nancy Hillis, by the way Berendt played around with the truth in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil?* While somewhat resentful at her exclusion from the Midnight concert tour and other promotional activities, she has nevertheless embraced her distorted reflection, Mandy. And, like many others in Savannah, she has capitalized on *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* by selling tie-in products like a video and a tour map.

Moreover, Berendt himself describes the book as an "entertainment," which was Graham Greene's term for the popular fictional thrillers he set in exotic places. Berendt's exotic travelogue-true crime tale certainly is an entertainment, and its impressionistic style might suggest that readers are not to take his account of Savannah as a definitive one except in mood and spirit.

But the distinction between an impressionistic style and a hard-factual style is one that will only resonate with the kind of literary audience Berendt had in mind when he wrote *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. "I was only thinking of the critics," the longtime *Esquire* columnist says. "I thought this is not a mainstream book: It's got a gay murder in it, a black drag queen, a city nobody knows."

Now that the book has gone through 78 printings and raised property values single-handedly in an entire city, Berendt must bear the burdens of his book's phenomenal success even as he enjoys its fruits. For one of the reasons people have taken such pleasure in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* is that they understandably assume that the book's wild stories are all the more amazing and amusing because *it's all true*. While I find disquieting the way in which Berendt acknowledged and then breezily shrugged off a series of small deceptions in his book, and would have more confidence in him had he been more forthcoming about some of the larger ones, I am inclined to believe his strenuous denials that he fictionalized other segments of his book as freely as he did the Joe and Mandy story.

But by fiddling with the truth in a book that has become influential, even if he did not expect it to be influential, Berendt has done his readers a disservice. And he has done himself a disservice as well, because small doubts about the reliability of an author in one part of his text may provoke *unwarranted* doubts about his reliability in other parts.

There is another moral problem here. Real-life people portrayed in popular books have to live with the portraits that have been drawn of them, and if those portraits are fictionalized, they may lose some control over the stories of their own lives. They are entitled to restore some of that control without being carped at by the author.

But given Berendt's hyper-aesthetic moral detachment from the events and the characters he portrays in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, maybe this isn't so surprising. "I do not express my opinion anywhere in the book, practically," Berendt says. "I thought I'd be criticized for not making moral points. I never say, 'This is good and this is bad.' I describe the light in Savannah filtering through the live oak trees and the Spanish moss." Berendt's narration is presented in moral monochrome: murder and charming social vignette sit side-by-side in the text, and those who fetishize the mascot of the Georgia Bulldogs seem just as eccentric as those who commune with the dead in graveyards at midnight.

Indeed, so rigorous is the narration's neutrality that readers may be surprised to learn Berendt is convinced that his central figure, Williams, was indeed guilty of the murder of his young lover. "I didn't want to say, 'Hey, he's guilty,' because so what?" Berendt explains. "This is really kind of a portrait, and ambiguity is sometimes better than being flat-out and saying what you think." ♦

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THE LIBERAL GENTRY

Being an Article Which Describes the Habits and Mores of a Newly Landed Aristocracy

By David Brooks

On November 14, 1996, there was an article buried deep inside the Home section of the *New York Times* that was so crammed with cultural import it made your head spin. The story was about Jane Amsterdam, the onetime media Pooh-Bah who edited both *Manhattan, inc.* and the *New York Post* in the 1980s. She's left her fast-paced media life and has moved to the Finch Farm estate in North Salem, N.Y.

Amsterdam now devotes much of her time to the amateur sport of driving horse-drawn carriages. She owns five horses, one named Bradlee for the former executive editor of the *Washington Post*. The carriages cost up to $20,000 apiece; one of them was built by an Amish maker. Amsterdam recently flew to Toronto to purchase lamps to go with her turn-of-the-century Stanhope rig, but succeeded only in procuring a 19th-century horse collar on the trip. Her husband, Jonathan Z. Larsen, is independently wealthy; though he edited the *Village Voice* from 1989 to 1994, he now devotes himself to environmental and charitable causes.

Now, this collection of data puts us at the vortex of many significant cultural trends. In the first place, we have a formerly glitzy magazine superstar forsaking the media *monde* so she can ride around in a carriage like Jane Austen on a cappuccino buzz. Second, we have the former editor of the *Village Voice*, a weekly designed to appeal to male and female urbanites with nipple rings, ensconced in some forest, racking up charitable tax deductions while listening to the birds chirp on his nine-and-one-half acre estate.

What we are seeing is the growth of an important class of American society: the Liberal Gentry. The Liberal Gentry is made up of middle-aged baby boomers who have accumulated enough disposable income to reject the mercenary values of unregulated capitalism. Instead, they retreat to privately owned estates in upscale rural America in an effort to simplify their lives, focus on their spiritual needs, and spend more time with their families. They are no longer going to put relentless pressure on themselves to become successful; now they are going to put relentless pressure on their kids to become successful.

The pilgrimage from hectic and distracted city life to languorous and earthy country life is the defining event of their new lives. The move is not only geographical, but from a lower to a higher moral plane, and it demands a wholesale change of wardrobe, furniture, household implements, and other products. So the drive to simplify one's life involves frantic consumer spending, because the Liberal Gentry must purge the glitz and polish of their former existence and replace it all with the accouterments of simplification—in the form of real estate (a private mountain), self-actualization equipment (carriages, fly-fishing suits), and household devices suggestive of spiritual growth (French bread ovens, Shaker-inspired computer consoles).

Theirs is an acquisitive spiritualism, because they use the process of shopping as a means to firm up their sensibility. Antique hunting is like an aesthetic Stairmaster session. It is precisely by searching for the perfect African artifact to go on the perfect redwood mantelpiece that sits in the perfectly renovated farmhouse that is situated in the most pristine 20-acre wildlife sanctuary that the Liberal Gentry can refine and demonstrate their taste and discernment.

So you have a class of people who do little work, travel constantly, and shop endlessly for items that will reflect their elevated position in society. In the old days, leftists would have called such people parasites and accused them of sucking off the production of the working class. But now, left-wing activists have a new name for them: donors.

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Part the Second: Status Inversion

The December 8 issue of the *New York Times Magazine* published an image that adds to our understanding of the Liberal Gentry. It was a full-page photo of Dr. Paul Ellwood, an earnest Minnesotan who has

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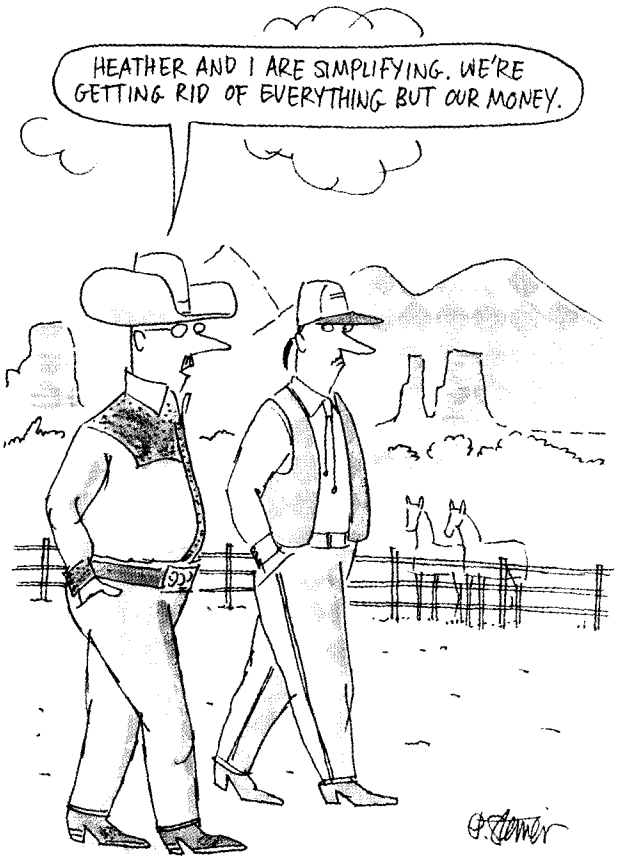

Peter Steiner

left his practice and built a $2 million home in Jackson Hole, Wyo., whence he has been plotting to overhaul the American health-care system. Covered in denim from head to toe, interrupted only by the gleam of a handcarved belt buckle, Ellwood stands alone in a huge expanse of floor. There is not a stick of furniture, just 200-year-old spruce trunks (they were not cut down; they volunteered) that rise from the foundation to support the exposed wood frame and the ceiling high above. Though the house looks as though it is roughly the size of the Astrodome, it has been designed to evoke a Shinto temple. There is even an Eastern religious artifact on the wall. It appears acceptable to display sacred items in a Liberal Gentry house as long as they are from a religion neither the host nor any of his guests is likely to profess.

In this great open space, practically unadorned, Ellwood has achieved the combination of grandeur and simplicity—Conspicuous Non-consumption—so prized among the Liberal Gentry. Mixing the huge with the modest, he has balanced seeming opposites and so created a Monastic Palace.

The Liberal Gentry are trying to elevate themselves not above those who are economically inferior, but rather above those who are equally rich but morally and aesthetically inferior. When you get to the tippy-top of the status stratosphere, you reach an area in which the only way to go higher still is to go down. This is what is called "status inversion."

When you have achieved "status inversion," you have reached a plane so high you begin to see people so important that they do *not* have a cellular phone. Here, anything meant to convey the impression of wealth directly—European antiques, say—is suddenly unfashionable. The farther you can move away from the obvious detritus of wealth, the more elevated you become, so long as you can display the objects of poverty in a way that makes it clear you are just rolling in dough.

In his book *The Refinement of America*, Richard L. Bushman describes the invention of gentility in the 18th century. "Creating parlors as a site for a refined life implied spiritual superiority," he writes. "Parlor people claimed to live in a higher plane than the vulgar and coarse populace."

The Liberal Gentry are creating a new gentility, except in a style that directly contradicts their 18th-century forebears. The original gentry covered up exposed beams in the ceiling, favored narrow floorboards as opposed to broad ones, buried the bulky stone chimney in plaster and paint, and tried to make every surface as smooth as possible. The Liberal Gentry accentuates exposed beams, favors broad planks, reconstructs vast stone fireplaces, and relies almost exclusively on rough and natural textures. "I didn't want any square corners," Carol Burnett says from her Santa Fe retreat, describing the dented and beat-up look so important to this set.

Now, the duty of all those who make a living by selling goods and services to the Liberal Gentry is to adapt to the reality of status inversion. The Liberal Gentry won't sip bisque from a soup bowl placed on the smooth surface of a Georgian dining-room table, but they'll lick quinoa off a battered oak board that once served as a work station in a French peasant's pig sty—after paying $12,500 for the oak board. They won't hang a Botticelli in their living room, but if you offer them a gnarled trunk recently unearthed from a Japanese bog, they'll open their checkbook—and pay a

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premium if there's still some algae sticking to it to authenticate its *chi*.

The beauty of the Liberal Gentry aesthetic is that the less you give them, the more they are willing to pay. A finely built Hepplewhite chair is refined and therefore vulgar, but a beat-up milking stool is authentic, rustic, and therefore virtuous and interesting. A hotel room with a television, radio, telephone, iron, and coffee maker goes for $75 a night. But a room in a bed-and-breakfast without any such conveniences can be full for months on end at $250 a pop. In the design of furniture and clothing, the rules are simple: Fire all your exquisite craftsmen and hire country bumpkins who build things rough and sturdy.

The things most desired by those who practice status inversion are, in the strictest sense of the word, reactionary. The objects may be tall or short, heavy or light, but they are all backward and primitive. The more obsolete something is, the more stylish it becomes. Horse-drawn carriages derive their beauty from the fact that they are not cars.

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Part the Third: Reactionary Progressives

Richard Moe, a former aide to Walter Mondale who is now head of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, is another member of the Liberal Gentry—you can read his story in the October 17 *Washington Post*. He hangs a crude wooden farm implement—it looks like it was used to chase witches in early Massachusetts—over the mantel in his creek-front cabin in Calvert County, Md. Turn-of-the-century carpentry tools are arranged atop the credenza behind his couch. A wind chime made of old forks and spoons hangs under the exposed-beam ceiling. Moe is particularly noteworthy because he has mastered the newly fashionable art of woodpile design. Woodpiles are at once authentic, earthy, primitive, and anti-commercial and thus make an important statement. Moe has arranged his neatly cut beech logs into a tower of pre-modern elegance, which nicely sets off the handmade, unvarnished, unfinished, and unused broom perched decoratively nearby.

The pilgrimage from the city to the private rustic escape is an attempt to escape the tyranny of time. The simplified life must be conducted in an atmosphere of timelessness, so you will rarely see clocks given prominent display in a Liberal Gentry home. But you will see collections of items rendered eternal by their obsolescence—not only the carpentry implements of Richard Moe's cabin, but also things like old typewriters, whaling equipment, butter churns, oak manure baskets, cans of liniment salve, coffee grinders, ice chippers, and hog scrapers. There is no business that offers higher profit margins than the transformation of useless junk into challenging objets d'art for the carriage crowd.

The greatest challenge for Reactionary Progressives is finding high-tech objects—a necessary element of the Progressive life—that can speak in the idiom of Reactionary Chic. I suspect a company like Bang & Olufsen will soon come out with a line of home stereos whose cabinetry is designed and built by the Amish of Lancaster County, Pa.

The question of how to produce Progressive cuisine in a Reactionary Chic environment has been answered brilliantly by the AGA 59-inch cooker. Patented in 1922, the cooker has an unadorned sturdiness that suggests it was once used to recycle horses into glue, but also features such conveniences as a warming plate, a simmering plate, a baking oven, a roasting oven, and a simmering oven. It uses no direct heat, only radiant surfaces, and thus expresses a genteel philosophy of life. It costs $10,000.

Another way the Liberal Gentry can hark back to the timelessness of the pre-capitalist era is to furnish their houses in OC mode (for "Oppressed Cultures"). One firm already in the game is Sakiestewa Textiles, Ltd., Co. "For more than a millennium," the company's publicity explains, "native peoples across the American Southwest have practiced masterful weaving techniques, creating intricately designed textiles at once functional and symbolic."

You can feel free to mix and match Oppressed Cultures. An African artifact can be positioned next to an Incan artifact or a Samoan artifact or an Amish artifact or an Assyrian artifact, because the only important ingredient in an Oppressed Culture is that it should hark back to an era long ago, a time before the advent of social mobility and the attendant pressures of meritocracy. (Scandinavian artifacts are often included in this community of primitive virtue, though the Nordic peoples are hardly oppressed; perhaps it's because Swedes and Norwegians spend so much time in the woods, living off welfare checks, eating berries in yogurt, and sullenly drinking themselves into a stupor.)

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Part the Fourth: Ownership of Nature

The Fall 1996 issue of *Contemporary Stone Design* magazine reveals that if you are serious about

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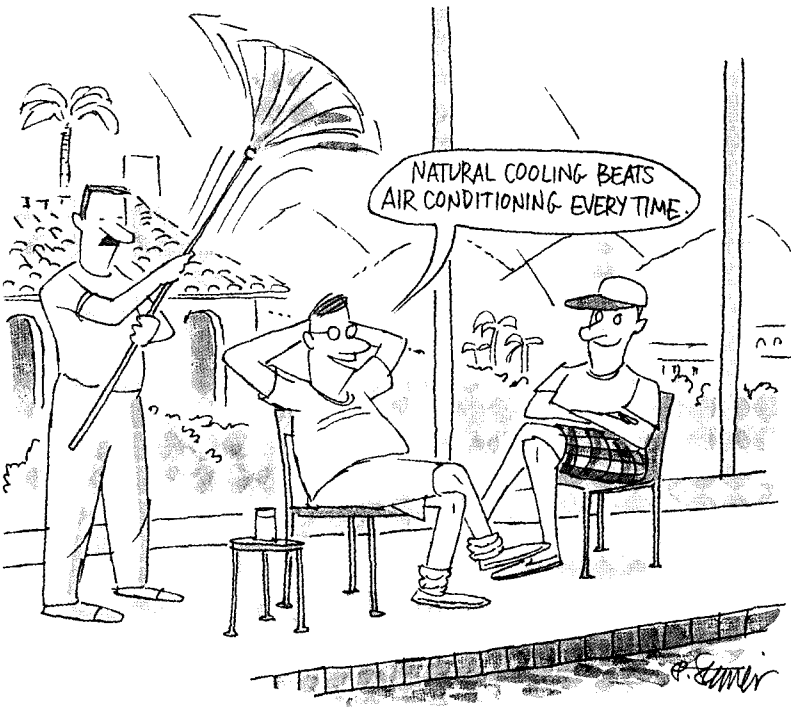
joining the Liberal Gentry, you simply must develop a reverence for rock. All rocks are natural, of course, but some rocks are more natural and thus more virtuous than others. Rough, authentic rocks like limestone, sandstone, granite, and slate are best of all—as long as they are mottled and not polished. Rock conveys the sense of historical permanence so important to all gentry, but especially to the Liberal Gentry, who are keen to demonstrate that their links to their property date back to at least the pre-civilization days of the Pleistocene Era.



Peter Steiner

The Liberal Gentry are keen to live amid nature. Now, for some naturalists, living amid nature means going *out* into nature, spending significant time amid nature in an $89 tent or a $10,000 cabin. But the Liberal Gentry strategy is to bring nature *in* amongst the more convenient confines of a home with an asking price of $2 million. Architect Larry Yaw was mountainbiking near Aspen when he saw a slab of sandstone he admired. So he acquired it and stuck it in the wall of a house he was building at the foot of Mount Hayden. Laura Goomas, a Saddle River, N.J., designer, took some Pennsylvania River Rock fieldstone and implanted it in a country kitchen. Home builder and developer Suzanne Brangham left the hectic life of San Francisco and had her Sonoma Valley house built of rammed earth, in which moist soil is compacted to form thick, sturdy walls. Now she lives surrounded by earth, her walls accentuated by the mesquite closet and bedroom doors, which squeak intentionally when opened.

Living in contact with nature is frequently buggy, cold, and uncomfortable. So bringing nature in and having it live in harmony with you is much nicer. It is far superior to appreciate the natural rhythms of the seasons when those seasons are separated from you by a 200-square-foot plate-glass window.

Given the general effort to obscure the barriers between inside and outside, curtains play a minimal role in the Liberal Gentry aesthetic. Instead, windows in renovated farmhouses are inevitably enlarged to gargantuan sizes to allow full natural vistas. How sweet it is to wake up in a bedroom with one wall made entirely out of glass allowing you to observe the sunrise! (It helps if you own the surrounding 160 acres so there will be no neighbor observing you observing the sunrise.) Nature must be owned and domesticated to make it intimate, which in turn maximizes its purifying effect.

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Part the Fifth: A Final Vision

The Liberal Gentleman stands atop his private mountain, fuming because the planes far overhead are disturbing his tranquility. He ponders the irony that the Unabomber, who had so many good ideas, nonetheless went astray. The wind comes up, and so, snapping up his all-cotton Labrador Field coat, he bids a silent farewell to the family of moose he has brought in to graze on his northern slope. As he sidles down toward the house, his bandanna-wrapped dog, Rugby, cavorting at his side, he reflects as usual on the links between himself and Tolstoy, who also bonded with nature and was so nice to his serfs.

The sun gleams off the kayak rack on his Land Rover as he walks gingerly around his trees, careful not to compact the soil over their roots. His garden has

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been subtly terraced, using recycled concrete risers taken from an old slaughterhouse. Rows of wildflowers are meticulously maintained alongside.

A sense of peace and beauty sweeps over him as he sees his wife practicing her flute on an old bench in the wood-sculpture garden. Since she became corresponding secretary of the Montana branch of the Urban League, she's had little time for self-expansion, and the winter will be busy when the bidding starts for her screenplay on the life of Bill McKibben, the Thoreau *de notre temps* who somehow manages to collect a living wage from the *New Yorker* (perhaps his paychecks arrive by oxcart). The Liberal Gentleman thinks it's good to see his wife getting in some artistic time, and she looks lovely in the oak-framed sunglasses she bought for only $135 from the Herrington catalogue.

The Liberal Gentleman ponders what to do with his afternoon. Paint? Prune? Go down to the Inipi? But soon a vague longing overcomes him. For to be an artist of the spirit, as all members of the Liberal Gentry are, is to be perpetually on the watch for ever deeper communion with the essence of Being. Somewhere out there in the infinity of Patagonia, there is a purer piece of wool outerwear, a more organic coffee bean, a more rustic pine table to be had, a more interesting way to recycle 19th-century fish netting into a shower curtain.

Despite the finely honed natural balance the Liberal Gentleman feels on his mountain, there is a gnawing worm of restlessness, an incompleteness that even another trip to the Galapagos will not cure. There is some inner hollowness that cannot be filled even by another *objet* on the redwood mantelpiece. Truth be told, the Liberal Gentleman will not discover his Holy Grail until his deathbed, when he will rest his pate for the last time on the slate headboard, look up for that final glimpse of the Cherokee-inspired canopy, and whisper with his dying gasp, "Muni bonds," realizing too late that contentment wasn't to be found in a mountaintop retreat staring at a Finnish bread oven but rather in a manic brokerage house, hunched over a trading terminal, in a glitzy city amidst all the frantic and kaleidoscopic activity of the real world. ♦

William Cohen, Secretary of Self-Love

By Tucker Carlson

Seldom has a politician left public office with more self-generated fanfare than Sen. William S. Cohen. "Last week, I announced that I would not seek reelection to the Senate," Cohen announced for the second time in a January 1996 *Washington Post* op-ed. "I have been moved by the reaction of my constituents and colleagues. Many expressed sadness over my decision, and nearly all were perplexed. Why are so many leaving the Senate? How can the center hold? Won't the system fall apart?"

His friends and admirers weren't the only ones who feared that Cohen's resignation might leave the Republic in shambles. Cohen feared the very same thing. In the middle of yet another farewell address—during which he described himself as, among other things, "Aesop's fly on the wheel of history's chariot"—Cohen related an anecdote that helps explain why he believes America might be unable to carry on without him: "I recall after supporting the crime bill two years ago, a call came into one of my district offices, and a man was very angry. He said, 'I am angry with your boss,' to one of my staffers. I said, 'Why was he angry?' He said, if you excuse the expression, 'He's too damn reasonable.'"

"Perhaps," said Cohen grandly, "that will be the epitaph on my gravestone."

Perhaps not. Cohen was nominated by President Clinton last month to be secretary of defense, a job that may ultimately earn him other burial inscriptions. The nomination seems at first blush a wise choice; the president added an experienced (and easily confirmed) foreign policy hand to his cabinet and can plausibly claim to have taken a stab at bipartisanship by choosing a Republican. Certainly Cohen approved; he described his own nomination as "a very bold and exciting move."

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To those familiar with Cohen's behavior over 24 years in Washington, his promotion also makes sense in a baby-boomer-pol kind of way. The relentless narcissism, the goofy sensitive-guy routine, the self-conscious and phony moderation—all these are characteristics Cohen shares with the man who hired him. Bill Cohen and Bill Clinton should get along perfectly.

Except they probably won't. It's not that the two men will disagree on all that much: Though Cohen is often called a "moderate," in truth his positions on issues like environmental protection and partial-birth abortion are not centrist, but solidly liberal. It's just that Cohen loves nothing more than to point out other people's flaws—especially when those people are nominally on his side.

Those who know Cohen have a hard time believing he will be able to keep the policy differences he does have with the administration private once he becomes defense secretary. "I can't imagine him supporting Clinton once he loses an argument," says a Senate staffer who has worked with him for years. "Subordinating himself to people who he disagrees with is absolutely anathema to Bill Cohen." A former high-level CIA official who dealt with Cohen during the latter's days on the Senate intelligence committee puts it this way: "If you make a deal with Cohen, you can't count on the fact it's going to be honored, because he does play to the galleries. He is very concerned with his image in the media."

When a reporter asked Clinton about Cohen's habit of tangling with members of his own political camp, the president made it clear he hadn't thought much beyond the confirmation process. "A man with a creative, independent, inquiring mind is just what we needed for this team," Clinton replied. Did the president read the press release Cohen's Senate office issued upon his retirement? It dubs Cohen a "true Renaissance man" and praises him for being "as close to the ideal definition of a public servant as one can get"—a man of "integrity" and "fierce independence" who specializes in "bringing executive branch wrongdoing to light." A man who allows such a document to go out from his own office—and who may very well have written the thing himself—is not going to make a good soldier, especially for Bill Clinton.

Cohen's reputation as a political straight-shooter began when, as a freshman member of the House Judiciary Committee in 1974, he voted for President Nixon's impeachment. In the Cohen myth, the vote to impeach has become something like a combination of the Exodus and Elvis's appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*—a single act that forged a great identity. President Nixon has "allowed the rule of law and the Constitution to slip under the boots of indifference and arrogance and abuse," Cohen proclaimed at the time. "The footprints of guilt must often be traced with the searchlight of probability." As recently as last month, syndicated columnist Robert Novak recalled Cohen's "courageous vote to impeach Richard Nixon."

Courageous? Hardly. Novak said as much at the time. In a May 1974 column, Novak pointed out that Cohen's stand against Nixon had brought the young congressman waves of support. "In truth, private polls show Cohen amazingly popular" in his Maine district, Novak wrote. Cohen's approval rating topped 80 percent. He received standing ovations from crowds even in conservative Maine counties. And, according to Novak, "Cohen's mail immediately following his rebuke to Mr. Nixon ran 10 to 1 in his favor."

Cohen's reception in Washington was, if possible, even warmer. "Judiciary Committee Members Splendidly Rising to History," declared one *Washington Post* headline. Another *Post* account described Cohen as one of "the young Republicans who will inherit their party's future." And those were *news* stories. The opinion pages were even more slavishly supportive. Not even Gerald Ford, Nixon's own vice president, publicly criticized Cohen for his position. Nixon was already facing profound image problems long before Cohen voted against him. His approval rating was mired at 24 percent; a strong national majority supported impeachment. So much for courageously bucking the tide of public opinion.

Far from hurting him back home with Republican voters, the publicity Cohen received during Watergate made him politically impregnable. Christian Potholm, Cohen's campaign manager at the time, says Watergate resulted in "a tremendous gain in [Cohen's] popularity with Democrats and independents." That November, Cohen won reelection by a large margin, beating a well-known Vietnam war hero and former POW.

For Cohen, the lesson was obvious, and before long he was once again in a fit of moral outrage, once again directed at a member of his own party. In December 1975, Cohen contacted a *New York Times* reporter to recount a startling breach of ethics in the Ford administration. A White House lobbyist, Cohen reported, had approached him and another Maine congressman with a deal: If they would vote with the administration on a tax bill, the president might be persuaded to reappoint a prominent Maine Republican to the National Transportation Safety Board. Shocked and appalled by the offer, Cohen publicly demanded that "disciplinary action" be brought against the lobbyist. "The one thing that will never be compromised is my integrity," Cohen announced in a statement dutifully reprinted

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in the *Times*. "My vote is not for sale, never has been and never will be. If we are going to establish and maintain confidence in our political system, then we have to reverse the widespread perception that it is just politics as usual in Washington."

The poor lobbyist must have been confused by the controversy, since swapping votes for favors *is* politics as usual in Washington, and in every other place in the world where democratically elected legislatures gather. As a second-term congressman, Cohen must have been fully aware of dozens of examples of similar behavior. Never before had he felt the need to call the press. On the other hand, calling the press had never before been so profitable.

Cohen played the maverick integrity card all the way to the Senate, beating incumbent William Hathaway in 1978 and winning two more terms decisively after that. Along the way, he took a seat on the Armed Services Committee, became knowledgeable about foreign policy issues, and helped write laws with unassailable monikers, like the Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989 and the Anti-Kick-Back Act of 1986. He kept up with pork-related obligations back home, working to steer business to his state's sizable defense industry, even fighting to make the government buy more Maine blueberries for school lunches and C-rations.

Cohen also continued in his role as his party's self-appointed moral voice. "Those who plant their feet in the concrete of ideological absolutism are heralded as heroic defenders of truth, justice and the American way," Cohen once thundered, complaining that thoughtful Republicans such as himself are derided as "mushy."

All this posturing seemed to play well in Maine. "People in Maine are ornery," explains Dick Morgan, a government professor at Bowdoin College, Cohen's alma mater. "They *liked* him because he had so little party loyalty." There was a lot of party disloyalty to like. When Republicans defeated the Clinton health-care plan, Cohen rallied a group of its supporters to construct a similar alternative. In 1995, he was the only Republican in the Senate to vote against the party leadership's budget reconciliation bill. By the end of '95, Cohen was voting with the Clinton administration more frequently than any other GOP senator.

The closest Cohen came to replicating his performance in Watergate was in 1986, when he helped run congressional investigations into the Iran-contra scandal. Quickly emerging as one of the Reagan administration's most aggressive critics, Cohen concluded the hearings by signing a majority-written report that described Reagan's aides as a "cabal of zealots." Cohen then teamed up with his Maine colleague, Democratic senator George Mitchell, and a year later produced a book on the affair entitled *Men of Zeal*.

The book is a tedious read, but it does end with a passage characteristic of Cohen's public pronouncements. More than simply wrong or illegal, *Men of Zeal* declares, the Reagan administration's stonewalling during Iran-contra was actually "another kind of warfare that threatens us." In prose so impassioned that it earned a blurb from none other than Dan Rather, the senators breathlessly conclude: "If we continue to lie to each other, or withhold information, or leak information, alter or shred documents, or put them in burn bags, . . . the damage that we will inflict upon ourselves would be as suicidal and destructive as any that has taken place in the Middle East."

Men of Zeal may be the future defense secretary's most famous published work, but it is only a small part of an ever-expanding oeuvre. Cohen has written eight books since being elected to Congress in 1972—three novels, three non-fiction works, and a couple volumes of poetry. Another volume, "an examination of how elderly people are victimized by fraud," is on the way. Spend any time reading Cohen's work and you quickly discover the Bill Cohen Paradox: Despite his job title and his widely recognized intelligence, Cohen is actually hard to take seriously.

A master of the tired platitude, the hackneyed quote, the incomprehensible metaphor, Cohen the prose stylist hovers somewhere between John Grisham and Judy Blume. On the other hand, for a man famous for being bland—between 1987 and 1990, he gave a mind-numbing total of 41 speeches at the Brookings Institution—Cohen isn't uniformly dull. "She wore no bra," Cohen writes of a nude female assassin in one passage from a 1991 mystery novel called *One-Eyed Kings*. "Her glistening body was supple and deeply tanned. The two touches of white—crescents on her firm breasts, a narrow band across her buttocks and groin—seemed like adornments on her dark, rippling skin."

Pretty amusing, but for truly delirious inadvertent comedy, check out *The Double Man*, a 1985 spy novel he wrote with Gary Hart. Ostensibly about a KGB-inspired terrorist plot, *The Double Man* is actually an extended meditation on the goodness of its protagonist, a moderate New England senator named Thomas Chandler. An accomplished, brilliant, incredibly well-read lawyer from a working-class family, Sen. Chandler is a public servant of regal "distinction," whose "bearing, the way he walked, identified him as a man in charge." Though he came to Washington to reform the corrupt political system, Chandler in time becomes an expert on foreign policy, with a special

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Sean Delonas

interest in NATO. The senator thus finds himself "preoccupied," not with his own success, but "with more important issues—the threat of nuclear war, the reformation of the tax code, protection of the environment against toxic wastes. . . . "

Standing in the way of such achievements is the usual group of conservative Republican ideologues making ugly noises about "the evils of abortion, sex, and liberalism." Somehow, in the end, Chandler rises above these loutish Neanderthals and succeeds in exercising his own brand of, yes, thoughtful moderation. Dan Rather blurbed this book, too.

Cohen's first love is poetry, and he commits it frequently. As his colleague Joseph Biden once explained, Cohen is "a poet, seriously a poet, a published poet." Cohen's verse addresses vital questions of the day: the Arab-Israeli conflict, the plight of Vietnam veterans, and the political situation in China. In 1985, he met, poet to poet, with Soviet writer Andrei Voznesensky and convinced President Reagan to do the same. "It's not going to change the way their government looks at us, or vice versa," Cohen conceded. "But at least you're building some lines of communications so you don't automatically paint everybody as a monster over there."

At the height of the controversy over the Strategic Defense Initiative, Cohen composed a poem entitled "High Frontier," later published in his 1986 volume, *A Baker's Nickel*. One stanza reads:

> *Before they unleash*
> *hurricane winds,*
> *Before they breathe*
> *through nostrils red*
> *beyond all Fahrenheit,*
> *Turn them to endless*
> *ash, yes, save us from*
> *their savagery.*

The poem's exact position on SDI is hard to read—"It's about man and his relationship to technology and science," Cohen told the *New York Times*—but it does appear generally supportive. Which makes it a lot like Cohen's own stand on many Republican-favored foreign policy issues. A longtime opponent of the nuclear freeze, Cohen backed most of the White House's positions during the Cold War. When he took exception, however (as with his opposition to the B-2 bomber), his exceptions tended to be loud.

In recent years, Cohen has been particularly outspoken about the need for strong missile defense. In August 1995, he took to the floor of the Senate to contend that the ABM treaty should be open to re-negotiation, arguing that the United States and key allies like Israel require protection from international threats not present when the original treaty was signed in 1972. Cohen's position on ABM is sensible. It is also dramatically at odds with that of the Clinton administration, which has declared the present ABM treaty "the cornerstone of strategic policy." One defense analyst on the Hill says that the administration thinks the treaty "is something that was brought down off Mount Sinai." Cohen's calls to amend it, he says, "just drove them crazy."

Cohen has never managed anything larger than a Senate staff, and he has never served in the military. But his past may offer clues to the kind of defense secretary he will make, and just how long he will last. In 1959, Dick Morgan was a cadet in charge of Bowdoin College's ROTC unit. One Monday morning in the fall as the group's drill exercises were beginning, Morgan remembers, "this Psi U freshman wandered in with an ill-fitting uniform. His cap was askew, nothing looking right. And the thought went through my mind, 'Oh, no, we'll never make a soldier out of him.' That was Bill Cohen. He lasted one day." ♦

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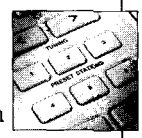

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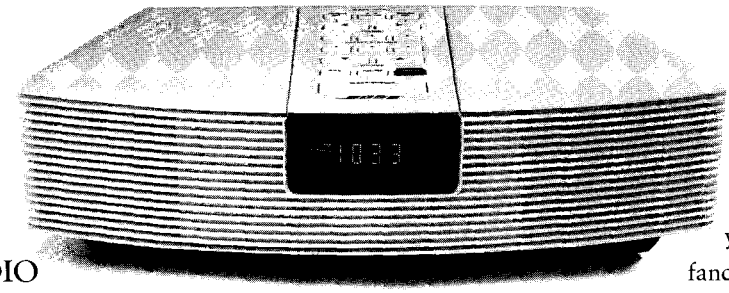

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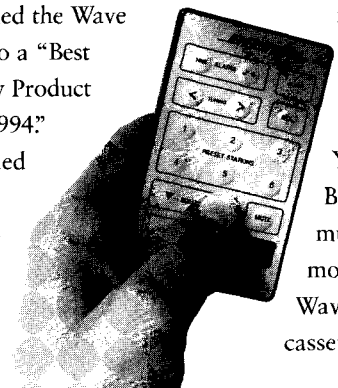

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Dr. Benjamin Spock . . . Neoconservative?

By Claudia Winkler

The first surprise on delving back into Dr. Spock on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of *Baby and Child Care* is that his much-denounced "permissiveness" is scarcely to be found. Peruse the pages of this record best-seller—still second only to the Bible—and you discover much practical sense and little talk of laissez faire. Ask around among the young parents you know, and plenty who call themselves conservative will describe Spock's book as handy and congenial. Consult your own personal favorite child-rearing authority, Marguerite Kelly, author of *The Mother's Almanac*, and she shrugs, "Frankly, I never could see what the fuss was all about."

The fuss, of course, was fixed in the national consciousness in 1968, when that icon of upstandingness the Rev. Norman Vincent Peale branded Spock the teacher of "instant gratification." And not surprisingly, the charge stuck: By then, the world's most famous pediatrician had come down with a bad case of peacenik politics at the unseasonable age of 59, making him a natural target. At the time of Peale's jeremiad, Dr. Spock was not merely a tireless antiwar demonstrator and speaker on college campuses, he had actually been indicted for conspiring to stymie the draft. To Americans repelled by the street politics of the day, Peale's theory had a satisfying plausibility: The baby boomers had been first spoiled, then radicalized, by the rather ridiculous Benjamin Spock.

The real story is more complicated. For if the original 1946 *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* did mark a break with the child-rearing style of former times and tellingly reflected the culture at mid-century, it is also true that Spock himself became an early cultural neocon of sorts. Already by 1968, revised editions of his book addressed head-on the values-deficiency afflicting parents and children; and nearly three decades later, Spock is telling parents that if they fail to raise their children within clear systems of belief—ideally, religious ones—the children are liable to feel adrift all their lives. True, his own politics remained simplistic, and in the 1970s his personal life careened over the guardrails and into a readily cartoonable (though apparently blissful) second marriage to a woman 40 years his junior. Nevertheless, in some essential and interesting ways, he remained—and remains, at the age of 93—a late-Victorian man.

The reader who goes to the trouble of tracking down the first edition of *Baby and Child Care* is rewarded with a glimpse of bygone days. An optimism pervades these pages that now seems stunningly naive. The assumption is that parents generally are steady, decent people of good judgment who will raise healthy, happy children as a matter of course. "Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do," runs the fabled opening. Be the reasonable, attentive person you are, and your baby's own natural development will lead him to fit in with your family's way of doing things. "Each child wants, himself, to eat at sensible hours, and later to learn good table manners," counsels the kindly doctor. "The desire to get along with other people happily and considerately develops within him as part of the unfolding of his nature, provided he grows up with loving, self-respecting parents." God's in His heaven, Mommy and Daddy love each other and love Johnny, and all's right with the world.

So serene is Spock about parents' ability to do their job successfully in the ordinary course of things that his original book is almost exclusively a reference work, a how-to guide to sterilizing bottles, choosing a sound diet, and telling sinusitis from tonsillitis from swollen glands. Discussions of child-rearing philosophy, as opposed to practical tips and briefings on the stages of development, are short and few. While normal problems like jealousy between siblings, contrariness, and childhood lying and stealing are matter-of-factly addressed, the possibility of serious disturbance, when alluded to, is disposed of with the confident assurance that consulting a psychiatrist will help.

Spock himself sought mid-career training at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute in the 1930s, and part of the appeal of his book was that it was considered up-to-date. Thus, his break with old orthodoxies especially the belief that infants had to be fed on schedule and that children should be made to obey strict rules bore the stamp of progress. The first edition of *Baby and Child Care* never taught "permissiveness" if the word means letting children prevail over parents. Instead, it painted a picture of

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parents' and children's interests in easy accord: "Your baby is born to be a reasonable, friendly human being. If you treat him nicely, he won't take advantage of you. . . ." It partook of the comfortable illusion that expert knowledge had cleared away the vestiges of age-old superstition and once and for all discredited authoritarian rigidities, making it possible for enlightened man at last to live in harmony with himself and the world.

But not for long. Six successive revisions of *Baby and Child Care* chart a steady retreat from this blithe confidence that children will naturally develop on an even keel. Starting with the second edition in 1957 and continuing through the 1992 edition now in print, passages urging parents to guide their children's emotional, social, and spiritual growth have been added or expanded and emphasized, as have discussions of the difficulties parents may encounter along the way. By now, the original three-page discussion of "Separated Parents," for instance, has turned into sixteen pages on "Divorce, Single Parenting, and Remarriage." Throughout, Spock is increasingly frank about the sheer dedication and self-sacrifice needed to meet the responsibility of being a parent.

Already in the second edition, the celebrated beginning is dramatically amplified. The single page headed "Trust Yourself," which formerly led straight into tips about items to acquire before the baby is born, is now followed by a new, much longer, second section entitled "Parents are Human." The subheads speak for themselves: "Some children are a lot more difficult than others. . . . At best, there's lots of hard work and deprivation. . . . Parents should expect something from their children. . . . Parents are bound to get cross. . . . Children like to be kept good." Spock explains in a foreword that the revisions reflect his observation that more parents are "getting into trouble with permissiveness than with strictness" and his wish to respond by giving a "more balanced view."

But it was in 1968 that Spock added a noteworthy six-page essay, retained in subsequent editions with little change. It is entitled "What Are Your Aims in Raising a Child?" and its subject is the confusion specific to 20th-century American parents: the little matter that we have "lost our convictions about the purpose of human existence."

In other times and places, Spock writes, communities have known that "man's main function in the world" was to serve God, or to serve his country, or to serve his family. In "child-centered America," we invite our children "to set their own aims and occupations in life according to their own inclinations." Moreover, lacking geographically rooted, extended families, Americans tend to turn for child-rearing methods not to family tradition but to experts and psychology. This approach can actually leave parents feeling more confused than ever, unless it is backed up by the parents' own clear sense of "what is right and proper"—and more and more parents are without such grounding, for our trouble is precisely that instead of holding firm convictions, "we are disillusioned."

The passage continues and is worth quoting from at length, with the context in mind: This is not a product of the religious reaction of the 1990s or of Ronald Reagan's America. The speaker is not Phyllis Schlafly or William Bennett or Marilyn Quayle, but that "permissive" white-haired ally of the hippies, Dr. Spock, in the year of the assassins, 1968:

> Fortunate are the parents with a strong religious faith. They are supported by a sense of conviction and serenity in all their activities. Usually they can pass on their faith to at least a majority of their children.
>
> Many of the people who have no religious faith are doubly deprived today, because they don't have much belief in man either. We live in a disenchanted disillusioned age—not about things, but about human beings.
>
> This has been evident in the increasing tendency in literature, plays and movies in the past fifty years to play down the kindly and spiritual aspects of man and to focus on the crude, animal side. Manners in social life have been coarsened, especially among women. Even greeting cards, instead of wishing invalids and relatives well, jeer at them. Art rarely shows attractive people; it omits them altogether or makes them hideous. Many youths cultivate dishevelment as if they are ashamed to be human and a few of them withdraw from society altogether.
>
> The disenchantment has been caused in part by the rapid strides in the sciences of biology, psychology and sociology, which have seemed to stress man's closeness to other animals, the crudeness of his basic instincts, the mechanicalness of his behavior patterns. Perhaps even more basic has been the weakening of the authority of religion in the minds of many people, caused by the increased authority of the sciences. This has greatly diminished man's former feeling that he was a very special and noble creature created in God's image.

Throughout childhood, Spock says, the young should be taught that "the most fulfilling thing that human beings can do is to serve humanity in some fashion and to live by their ideals." He pleads the primacy of selflessness and of man's spiritual nature, offering the Freudian explanation of how this develops out of the small child's loving, trusting idealization of his parents and the sublimation of sexuality. Nor does Spock shy from impressing on parents the lasting importance of the example they set: If parents "have aspirations, if they have a respect for themselves, for each other and for [their child], he will continue to be inspired by their pattern."

Spock carries this line of thinking further in his recent book *A Better World for Our Children:*

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Rebuilding American Family Values, published in 1994. By this time, acute alarm about the state of the culture has erased all trace of the old serenity. In a statement to which Newt Gingrich, Hillary Clinton, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn could probably all subscribe, Spock calls this a country "on the skids—we are neglecting our children emotionally and educationally, marriage is increasingly unstable, we are slipping deeper and deeper into acceptance of violence, we are losing our sustaining spiritual beliefs and we are absorbed in materialism and competitiveness. If we allow these trends to continue I see us slipping further into chaos."

Spock's prescription for halting the slide combines the liberal-to-radical politics he has steadfastly championed ever since the early 1960s (and which he now manages to sneak discreetly into even *Baby and Child Care*) with, again, religion. He writes that he "envies" believers and explicitly favors religious training for the children of all but convinced atheists, on the grounds that it will give children both a "moral and spiritual framework to support and inspire them" and a sense of connection to their culture.

Even this would not have satisfied Norman Vincent Peale, of course, although he and Spock had much in common and make an intriguing pair. Both were authors of hugely popular how-to books, Peale's most famous being *The Power of Positive Thinking*, published in 1952 and beginning, "Believe in yourself! Have faith in your abilities!" Their lives spanned the century—Spock was born in 1903; Peale lived from 1898 to 1993—and with equal vehemence they deplored its coarsening culture and "progressive loss of values," in Spock's words. Each saw both psychology and religion as avenues to successful living; the "personal problems clinic" at Peale's Marble Collegiate Church on Fifth Avenue was staffed by psychologists as well as pastors, and in 1951 he launched the American Foundation of Religion and Psychiatry. Yet in the end, they were on opposite sides of a cultural chasm.

Dr. Spock

Kevin Chadwick

This was most obvious in politics. Finding the Democrats too prone to compromise, Spock ran for president in 1972 on the People's party platform of "cooperation, feminism, and world peace" (and garnered 80,000 votes). Peale, meanwhile, joyfully presided at the marriage of Julie Nixon and David Eisenhower and preached to our troops in Vietnam. Their backgrounds were different, too. Peale was a midwesterner and man of the people, Spock an East Coast graduate of Yale. And Spock's personal life, unlike Peale's, is marked by conspicuous contradictions: Even as he urges fidelity to ideals, he expresses regret about his own performance as a father and as husband to the wife he divorced after 48 years. The core contrast, though, is that Spock recommends God as psychologically useful, while for Peale God is real and the source of inner healing.

But that Spock should recommend God at all, given his reputation, is the matter of interest. It was the journalist Jessica Mitford who put her finger on the explanation in her lively 1969 book *The Trial of Dr. Spock*. (He was convicted, by the way, but for acts of protest against the Vietnam War clearly protected by the First Amendment, and the conviction was thrown out on appeal.) Spock, Mitford wrote, was "very much the product of his Protestant-Republican upbringing in the early part of the century, his [antiwar] stand a logical development of the outsize New England conscience conferred upon him by his parents."

A lawyer's son, Spock describes his turn-of-the-century childhood in New Haven and Maine as filled with "stern moral teaching." The parents who reared him entertained no sanguine illusion that little Ben and his siblings would simply unfold into honorable citizens; nor were their minds darkened by the disenchantment Spock would recognize as troubling later generations. His mother deliberately

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"inspired her children with idealism and a drive to serve." Their religious education was "a matter of course."

Inevitably, when Dr. Spock got over his fling with optimism, he reverted to type. In his own childhood, the faith of an earlier age had armed him with strong principle. As an adult he shed any specifically religious belief, but he retained a sense of human existence as undergirded by moral strictures—and of parents' duty to show their children the way. Permissiveness? Not on your life. "When a parent is timid or reluctant to give leadership," says the current *Baby and Child Care*, "the children—especially those of the same sex—feel let down. They are like vines without a pole to grow on." ♦

Books

EVELYN AND NANCY

By Roger Kimball

Is there anything left to say about Evelyn Waugh? Since his death in 1966 at the age of 62, a veritable industry has grown up around the great satirist. A somewhat cloying but immensely popular television miniseries of his novel *Brideshead Revisited* got the ball rolling in the early 1980s. Practically all his work has been reissued, and several biographies have been undertaken—I can think of three off the top of my head, two full-length jobs in the last few years alone. An 800-page selection from his diaries appeared in 1976, 650 pages of letters came out in 1980, and a fat collection of his reviews and essays in 1984. The biographer Humphrey Carpenter even wrote a book called *The Brideshead Generation*, thus elevating Waugh to totemic status.

The novelist and biographer Nancy Mitford has not enjoyed anything like the attention lavished on her friend. But she, too, has become something of a cottage industry. In 1985, twelve years after her death, Jonathan Guinness's *The House of Mitford* appeared, a "family portrait" detailing the exploits of Mitford's parents, Lord and Lady Redesdale, their son, and their six beautiful and—in three cases, anyway—notorious daughters.

Charlotte Mosley
The Letters of Nancy Mitford and Evelyn Waugh
Hadder and Stoughten

The story it tells is by turns hilarious and appalling. In 1936, Diana, the Mitfords' third daughter, married Sir Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists, and spent the better part of the war in jail. Unity, the fourth daughter, was a friend and fanatical admirer of Hitler; in 1939, when the war began, she put a bullet in her head but lingered on, a damaged and deranged creature, until 1948. Jessica, the fifth daughter, rounded things out by joining the Communist party and marrying a Communist.

Nancy was the oldest of the Mitford sisters. Her best and funniest novel, *The Pursuit of Love*, contains as much family history as fiction. Her talent—like Waugh's, only smaller in compass and not as lacerating—was essentially comic. The sensibility of both writers was leavened by a generous dollop of acidulous snobbery, often delightful to witness, no doubt distinctly less amusing to experience firsthand. Both the comedy and the snobbery are on exuberant display in their letters, not least in some 500 items they wrote to each other.

Charlotte Mosley, Nancy's niece by marriage, has brought out a collection containing almost all of the correspondence between Waugh and Mitford, from the mid-forties until a month or two before Waugh's death. Some 40 percent of the letters by Waugh and 80 percent of those by Mitford were previously unpublished. Much that had to be left out of earlier collections because of the threat of libel has been restored here; consequently, tantalizing ellipses indicating excised material are gratifyingly rare in *The Letters of Nancy Mitford and Evelyn Waugh*, recently published in Great Britain.

As in her edition of Nancy's letters, published in 1993, Mosley's intelligent and informative notes give this book a narrative coherence that such collections often lack. The result, quite simply, is one of the most entertaining epistolary conversations of the century. "Reading their correspondence," Mosley notes in her introduction, "is like overhearing a conversation between two quick-witted, provocative, very funny friends, who know the same people, read the same books, laugh at the same jokes and often share the same prejudices."

Waugh and Mitford first met in the summer of 1928. Nancy was a close friend of Waugh's first wife, Evelyn Gardner, whom he married that year. The marriage, alas, was a disaster from the word go. In 1930, She-Evelyn (as the first Mrs. Waugh was known) ran off with John Heygate, a news editor for the BBC. Shocked by her friend's defection, Mitford sided firmly with Waugh and never spoke to

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She-Evelyn again.

In 1933, Nancy, on the rebound from an unrequited love, precipitously married Peter Rodd—"Prodd" to his friends and many enemies. The marriage, she soon realized, was a serious mistake. Handsome, clever, and from a distinguished family, Rodd was also pompous, drunken, profligate, licentious, and otherwise disreputable. Waugh cordially disliked Rodd; indeed, Rodd is the model for the character Basil Seal, the seductive and sinister antihero of *Black Mischief* and other books.

Nancy's marriage, as Mosley puts it, "limped through the years leading up to the war." By 1939 it was over in all but name (they were not divorced until 18 years later). In 1941 she began working at Heywood Hill's bookshop on Curzon Street—then as much a literary salon as a store, and still one of the best and most charming booksellers in London. In 1942 she met Gaston Palewski, a Free French colonel on de Gaulle's staff in London. For Palewski, the affair was little more than a charming *jeu d'esprit*; for Nancy, it was the central love affair of her life. In 1946, after the war ended, she moved—permanently, as it turned out—to Paris to be near "the Colonel." Her lifelong devotion survived everything, from his numerous affairs and long absences to the final devastating blow of his marriage to another woman in 1969.

Soon after Nancy moved to Paris, Waugh wrote her that "no one departure has left such a yawning (literally) hole in London as yours." In fact, though, theirs was a relationship that blossomed most fully long distance, through the medium of pen and ink. As Waugh's best biographer, Selina Hastings, notes, "their friendship became consolidated by letter. Both were at their best on paper . . . hilariously witty, sometimes cruel, frequently childish; they both drew on deep wells of anger and disappointment; they were both prejudiced, provocative, arrogant, and essentially kind-hearted."

But if certain shared traits encouraged their epistolary intimacy, deep and abiding differences lent it piquancy and edges. Waugh and Mitford were from the same social set, but in other respects they were a study in contrasts, and temperamentally they were opposites. Mitford was sanguine, Waugh melancholic. At the end of the decade, Nancy wrote that she "enjoyed every moment of the 1940s," adding that "what is so nice & *so* unexpected about life is the way it improves as it goes along." For Waugh, such cheeriness was infuriating: "Of course I am cross with you for being happy," he wrote, only partly teasing. "It is entirely indecent." Waugh became increasingly bitter, isolated, and—one of his favorite words about himself in later life—"enfeebled" as he got older: "I am quite deaf now," he wrote in 1953. "Such a comfort." In one revealing passage, he admitted, "I can only bear intimacy really & after that formality or servility. The horrible thing is familiarity." Despite an increasing battery of travails, physical as well as emotional, Nancy waxed ever more serene. "How I shrieked!" is a giddy refrain in her letters.

Kent Lemon

Evelyn Waugh

Waugh and Mitford were also separated by politics. Nancy never entertained the extreme views that seduced some of her sisters, but she was, as she put it, "a milk and water socialist." Mosley is quite right to describe Waugh as "a born reactionary who regarded it as his duty to oppose the encroachment of the modern world in any form." This made for some amusing clashes. "Nancy," Waugh wrote in an article in 1951, "having voted socialist and done her best to make England uninhabitable, broke from her chrysalis, took wing and settled lightly in the heart of Paris."

"I must beg you with all earnestness," he wrote her in 1946, "if we are to continue friends, never use the word 'progressive' in writing to me. . . . It makes me sick and agitated for hours to read it." For her part, Nancy gave as good as she got: She was, indeed, one of the few people who consistently stood up to Waugh's bullying. "I know you can't tell the difference between Lloyd George & Stalin," she retorted, "but other people can." In 1951 she asked, "I often wonder what sort of world you would like to live in? Berlin under Hitler seems to come the nearest." Responding to a draft of an article that Waugh was writing

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about her, she insisted: "You MUST modify your statement that I'm a communist agent. . . . Think of me as a *Christian*," she suggested, "early, if you like."

Religion divided them as well. Always intolerant, after his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1930, Waugh extended his intolerance to spiritual matters. "It is not that I think your soul in danger," he wrote Nancy in 1949, "but that I doubt if you have a soul at all." Religious questions pop up often in his correspondence, and sometimes the discussion is serious, sometimes merely sarcastic. "My dear Nancy," Waugh began in 1951, "Would it not be best always to avoid any reference to the Church or to your Creator? Your intrusions into this strange world are always fatuous. With love, E."

Nancy's brisk retort suggests her annoyance: "Don't start My dear Nancy I don't like it. I can't agree that I must be debarred from ever mentioning anything to do with your creator. Try & remember that he also created me." Waugh was once asked how he could behave so brutally and still call himself a Christian. He famously replied that, were it not for his faith, he would barely be human.

There is a fair amount of literary shop talk in these letters—the merits of so-and-so's latest book, the defects of some fashionable author. "I am reading Proust for the first time," Waugh writes in 1948, "and am surprised to find him a mental defective. No one warned me of that."

By the mid-'40s, Waugh was a renowned figure in the literary world, Nancy still a fledgling. Although she did not always take his advice, she clearly considered him her chief authority on literary matters and submitted to numerous letters criticizing everything from her plots to her grammar and punctuation. ("The punctuation," Waugh wrote about *Love in a Cold Climate*, "is pitiable but it never becomes unintelligible so I just shouldn't try. It is clearly not your subject—like theology.")

Like most writers, Waugh and Mitford were obsessed by money, and their letters are full of sums made, promised, taxed, and spent. Protestations of poverty are frequent. "I have been doing sums for weeks & find I am hopelessly ruined," Waugh wrote in 1952. He promised to economize by, among other things, sacking his brood of servants. Nancy shot back that "life without servants is not worth living—better cut down in any other way."

Kent Lemon

Nancy Mitford

They could be merciless about their friends and acquaintances. Waugh wrote to tell Nancy that Cyril Connolly had been commissioned by *Time* magazine to do a profile of him. "I said 'On the day the article appears I shall horse whip you on the steps of White's.' He turned green white yellow & grey and then said: 'what will you pay me not to write it?'"

Winston Churchill's hapless son Randolph was the butt of many anecdotes. Waugh recounted Randolph's standing for Parliament and, nervously awaiting the election results, asking the town clerk how he was doing:

> "Thirty something thousand and something." "Isn't that rather good?" "Oh yes you're quite safe. We've only a few more to count and they can't affect the result." Dazed with joy [Randolph] rushed out & told his committee. All embraced. Two minutes later the town clerk padded out; "Oh Mr. Churchill I made such a silly mistake, I gave you Mr. Foot's figures."

Randolph inspired some of Waugh's most famous barbs. Writing in his diary after Randolph had been operated on for a lung tumor that turned out to be benign, Waugh observed that "it was a typical triumph of modern science to find the only part of Randolph that was not malignant and remove it."

There are some unpleasantnesses in this book: Waugh's blimpish anti-Semitism, Mitford's hysterical anti-Americanism. "I hate them so much now," Nancy wrote in 1953 about Americans, "that I ALMOST (I don't say quite) don't care to touch their beastly money." But such snobberies and crudities seem somehow beside the point. What these masters of epistolary wit have given us is not something to be analyzed and judged but something to delight and amuse and beguile. ♦

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Movies

Cruise Controlled

By John Podhoretz

Hollywood loves "high-concept movies," films whose plots can be summarized in a single phrase, like "dinosaurs come back to life in an amusement park." So besotted is the motion-picture industry with the high-concept approach that many movies no longer even need plots at all, only titles—*Twister*, for example, not to mention the upcoming *Volcano* and *Titanic*. The plot of the new Tom Cruise movie *Jerry Maguire* can be captured in a simple phrase: "Sports agent undergoes personal crisis." True, that doesn't sound like much, especially considering that *Jerry Maguire* lasts well over two hours.

It is. *Jerry Maguire* is the best American film of the year, maybe of the last few years. Nothing that happens in *Jerry Maguire* is predictable—not a plot development, not a joke, not even a camera angle. It seems like decades since a mainstream American movie devoid of special effects or a fantastical storyline has been able to surprise us, to show us something new. It is even more remarkable that the first one to do so in memory stars Tom Cruise, the biggest box-office draw in motion pictures, giving a revelatory performance.

The wondrously deafening explosion you hear as you watch *Jerry Maguire* is the sound of the most tiresome Hollywood clichés of the last 20 years being atomized. The first surprise writer-director Cameron Crowe springs on us comes in the opening sequence. Usually, movies about the moral transformation of a jerk spend half an hour proving what the audience knows in 30 seconds: The main character is a completely inauthentic liar who gets his way with charm and guile. Rather than belabor the point for 45 minutes, as other movies would—and thereby make us love the inauthentic man and hate the reformed sinner whose goodness is then shoved down our throats for the remainder of the movie—Crowe manages to get us through this part with dazzling speed.

At a weekend getaway for sports agents, among whom he is a king, Jerry Maguire mistakes a bout of food poisoning for a crisis of conscience and bats out a 25-page manifesto in his hotel room about the moral degeneration of his business. He has the document printed up and delivered to every sports agent in the hotel. But once his illness clears, so does his conscience, and Jerry tries to get the copies of his manifesto back. Too late: He receives a standing ovation from his colleagues as he walks through the hotel lobby—among them a gawky accountant in his firm named Dorothy (the breathtaking Renee Zellweger) so dazzled by his newfound moral authority that she immediately falls in love with him. Jerry thinks he's dodged a bullet and returns to Los Angeles to enjoy his life with a beautiful and chilly fiancée (Kelly Preston) and a vast collection of friends who are, of course, anything but.

A few days later he is brutally fired by his one-time protégé—and, in a spectacular depiction of an economic war conducted in one afternoon's time over the telephone, loses all his clients but one. Jerry is suddenly friendless and alone save for Dorothy, who impulsively agrees to come work for him even though she is a single mother of a five-year-old boy.

That's just the first 15 minutes of *Jerry Maguire*—and it is only at this point that the movie begins in earnest. What will Jerry Maguire be like now that he has been laid low? Crowe offers no simple answer. The new Jerry proves both kind and desperately selfish toward Dorothy, who becomes his lover when his engagement ends. He behaves like a coward, especially when dealing with his last remaining client, a money-grubbing, petulant, but exuberant wide receiver limned by the supercharged young actor Cuba Gooding, Jr. (The wide receiver's relatives come to play an important part in the story, and in their scenes Crowe offers an astonishingly sensitive and unusually honest depiction of a black family.)

And Jerry becomes a genuinely admirable man, especially in his relations with Dorothy's father-hungry son, Ray. I am not exaggerating when I say that there has never been a child in a movie—*any* movie—as memorable as Ray. Usually, movie children impress us with their gravity and sobriety; they seem far older than their age. In the person of the chubby-cheeked Jonathan Lipnicki, Cameron Crowe has given us a little boy who really *is* a little boy—giggly, jokey, loud, desperate to impart what few facts he has gleaned to anyone who will listen. Jerry's immediate attachment to Ray is not only believable; it seems inevitable.

Watching a movie that takes you by the hand and leads you through the twists and turns of its characters lives over the course of two hours is the true glory of film, and the degeneration of the Hollywood movie from character study to bread-and-circus spectacle is the reason why so many of us have simply stopped going to the multiplex. *Jerry Maguire* is a stunning reminder of what has been lost, and how Hollywood can get it back. ♦

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NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Multiple Gore-gasms

Can reporters find the words to express the depth of their admiration for the Veep? By Howard Fineman

THIS WAS THE BIG One: Vice President Al Gore entered the White House East Room and nodded to the scores of journalists writing profiles of him. The world would soon find out whether it was possible for even one national reporter to write a piece on the vice president without showing the afterglow of multiple Goregasms. Tall, stately, regal, here stood an awesome figure, at ease with being a heartbeat away from leadership of the free world, a man who could justify the sort of portentous prose White House correspondents perfected during the Cold War, when the White House truly mattered.

Gore had come to the East Room to perform one of those duties he has mastered with such grace: a photo op with the winner of the 4-H Club of Eastern Kentucky Heifer of the Year Award. As the vice president entered through one door, the award-winning cow entered through another, and in a carefully choreographed maneuver that betrayed meticulous staffwork, they approached each other with the awesome dignity that pervaded the room at the Council of Vienna when Metternich first met Castlereagh.

A flicker of recognition swept across the cow's bovine features, as it recognized the author of *Earth in the Balance*. Here is a man, the cow seemed to be thinking, who has achieved awesome influence across the entire administration, who has planted his people in key posts, and yet who still remains a friend to animals and ferns.

The vice president opened his address to the cow and the small group of 4-H members by reminiscing about his days in the 4-H Club (Ritz-Carlton Hotel branch, near Dupont Circle), the wonders of nature, and the importance of establishing a bovine presence on the information superhighway. But then, about 45 minutes into his remarks, the vice president made one of those daring proposals that are the hallmark of his career. He spoke of the awful frustration that cows must feel in captivity. He suggested that the Department of Agriculture initiate a program to return cows to the wild. After several passionate minutes, the vice president finally flung open the main doors of the room and exulted, "Go free, cow! Live free! In the glory of nature as God intended!"

Awash in tears, the press corps was already preparing the puff pieces that would so dominate the media in the ensuing weeks. ■

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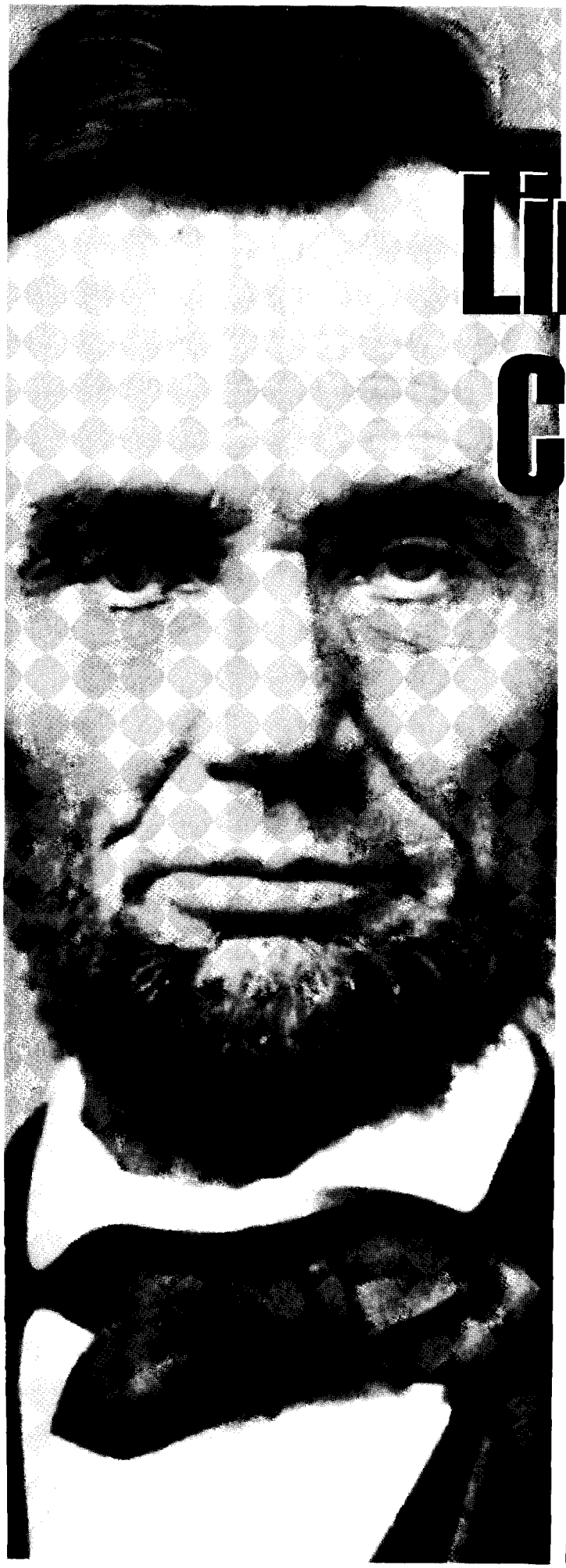

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Jefferson's Vision of Christmas Future

They say that time heals all wounds but it also clouds the memory of the past. When America was born, the one timeless slogan that has endured is "No taxation without Representation!"

Our founding fathers knew all too well the dangers of a government in need of hard cash. To prevent America from becoming another Big Brother state, any form of a direct income tax was strictly forbidden. Government funding was restricted to purely a consumption or excise based tax. The reason was quite simple. Government action is determined by the tax system employed. The difference between a direct form of income tax and a consumption tax is startling.

Direct Income Tax

Government needs to know everything. Where you work, live, marital status, number of children, who your parents are, what gifts they might give to you or your children, how much savings you have, what interest you earn, what expenses you have, how much time you work at home, etc.

And if your parents die, you cannot open a safety deposit box without a representative of the government being present. In other words, Big Brother has to watch every citizen, know everything they are doing and what investments they have made for the future.

Consumption Tax

Government only needs to know where the stores are located. That's it - no file on you, your family or parents! The more desperate government becomes the more freedom we lose. Already, if you leave the US on vacation, custom's agents are searching people's wallets looking for credit card receipts to see what you may have spent overseas. Then they inform your local State and 3 years later your are hit with State use taxes plus interest and penalties.

If we do not get Marxism out of the American tax code, our children will lose all memory of what Freedom was all about.

For more information on the Princeton Proposal for tax reform & economic growth, contact:

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